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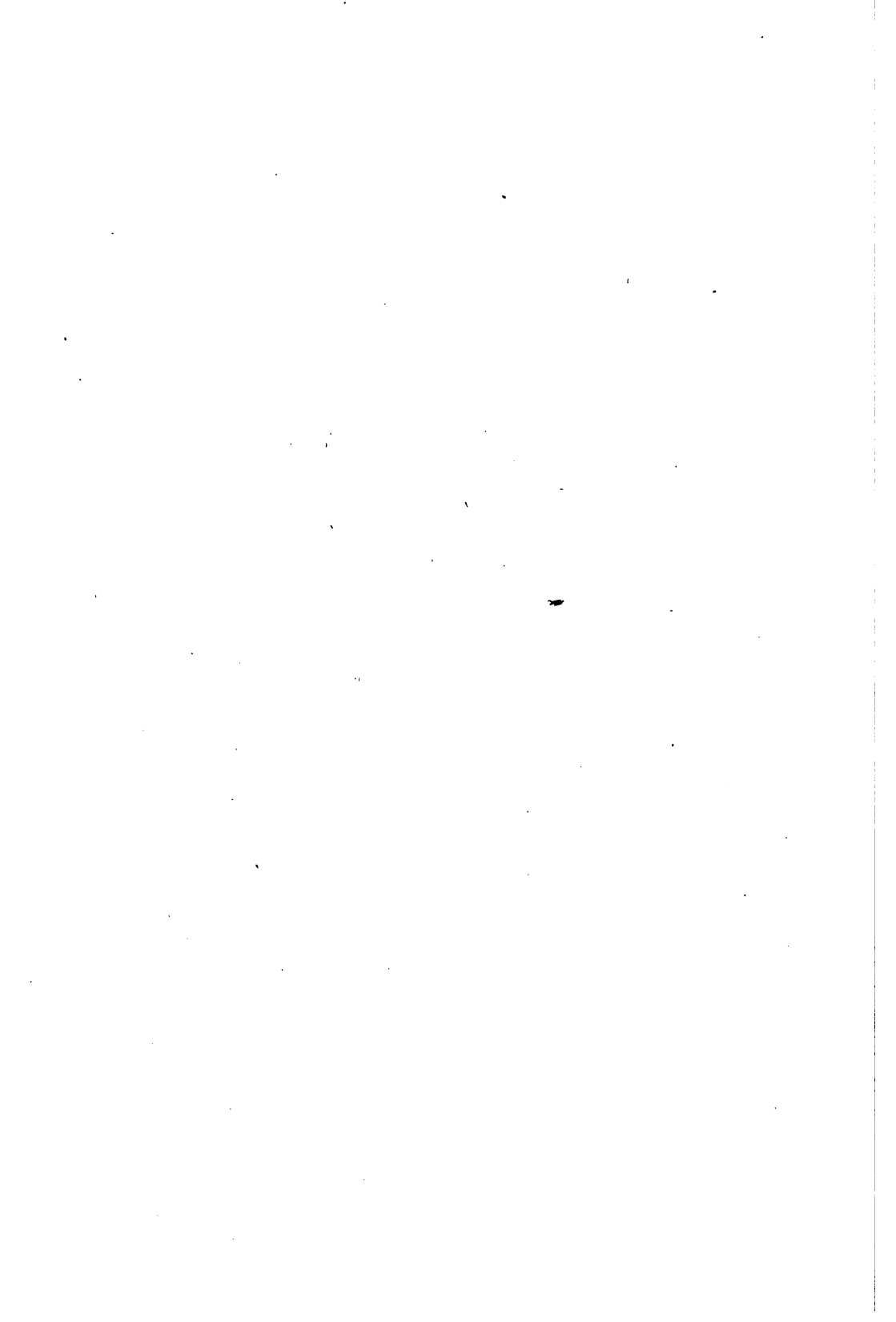
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# **The Beggars of England**

in

**Prose and Poetry**

(Part I)

from

**the earliest times to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.**

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**Inaugural-Dissertation,**

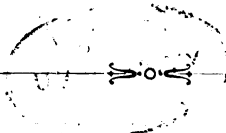
**der philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Bern**

zur

**Erlangung der Doktorwürde vorgelegt**

von

**Albert Tschopp.**

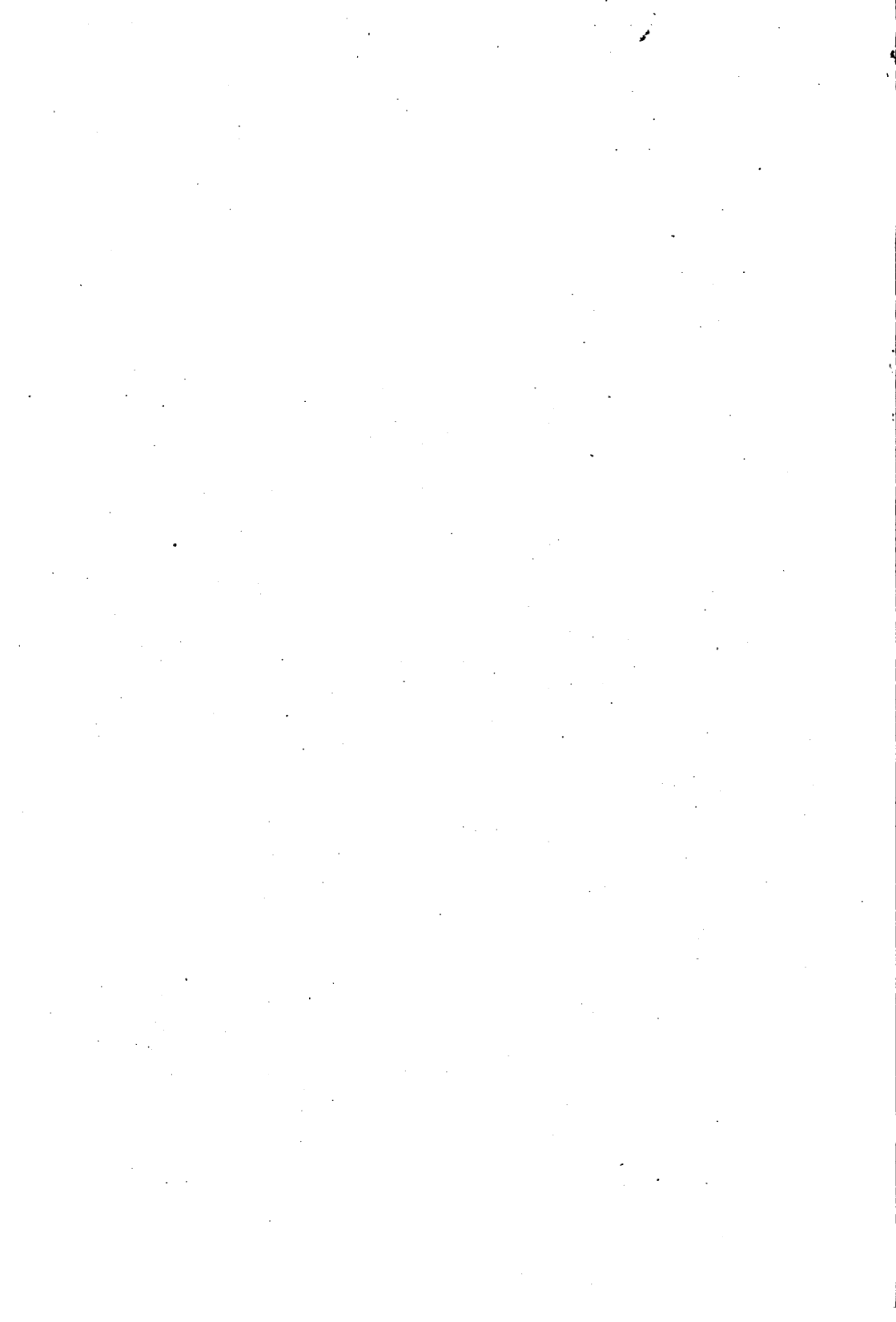


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**Albert Tschopp.**



*Von der philosophischen Fakultät auf Antrag des  
Herrn Professor Dr. Müller-Hess angenommen.*

*Bern, den 18. Juli 1902.*

*Prof. Dr. Ed. Fischer,  
z. Z. Dekan.*

## Introduction.

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The idea of this dissertation came to me whilst studying the sources of Burns' »Jolly Beggars«. I tried to find out the position held by the beggar in the annals of English Literature, whether the beggar played a rôle in drama or ballad or if expressions of his language had entered the English vocabulary.

Dr. Binz, Professor of the University Bâle, gave me valuable help in my researches and I owe to him, as also to Professor Dr. Müller-Hess of Bern, under whose direction I completed my dissertation, a deep sense of obligation and gratitude.





## **Concerning the Introduction and Preservation of the Beggar Ballad.**

It is interesting to mark the progress of the ballad and its different language and tendency in the various centuries.

In early years the ballad was rude and powerful, generally describing battle-scenes or tales of extraordinary marvel. As the centuries advanced so did the taste change and in the 12<sup>th</sup> century we find the simple and rough pictures of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century no longer acceptable. Again in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries do we note a marked change. The former ballads are voted improbable and insipid, in the place of which short, rollicking songs and ballads of a gay and somewhat immoral tendency are substituted.

It is to these latter that we owe the greater part of our jovial beggar literature, although even the earliest ballad-writers were not averse to the familiar figure with his: »wallet and staff and clouted rags«. The beggar ballads had the same fate as all the other Mediæval songs and poems. They were recited, sung, or accompanied by the harp, but seldom written down. It is for this reason that the English Ballad has descended to us in such an imperfect condition. We often find whole stanzas missing and passages utterly incomprehensible.

The general way in which we have come into the possession of the most valuable English ballads is by mothers singing them to their children or old women reciting them, having heard their ancestors recite the poems before them. There are, however, some extant

*copies* of ballads printed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1)</sup> and it is not improbable that more collections exist hidden from the public eye.

It was the general habit of singing which caused the enormous demand for ballads in the Middle Ages. A »song and a toast« was the finale of every banquet and, in fact, it was not only at the conclusion, but during the meal itself that music was demanded. Langland<sup>2)</sup> says that at the tables of the rich there were only two amusements: »to listen to the minstrels and when they were silent to scoff at religion«.<sup>3)</sup> At the tables of the poor and round the stove of the ale-house *beggars* often supplied the place of minstrels, their lively songs and merry descriptions of different towns through which they had roamed forming a pleasing diversion and accompaniment to the, »jolly good ale and old«. C 17, 74 . . . C 7, 374 . . . C 7, 362 . . .

The greatest restorer of the old English ballad is Percy to whom we owe some of our most interesting beggar poems notably: »The Beggar of Bednal Green«, King Cophetua and the Beggarmaid etc. etc. Child also, in his »English and Scottish Ballads«, has unearthed a collection of poems of an historical and narrative character.

In the »Roxburgh Collection« and »Bagford Ballads« we are treated to a more recent and lighter style of poetry peculiarly adapted to the introduction of the beggar with all his fun and cunning.

Most of our personal research after beggars was, however, laid in books now long out of print.

The ballads supplied the *poetry* of the beggar's life, but we had to search deeper for the *prose*.

<sup>1)</sup> Collections of ballads: The Roxburghe and Pepys Collections.  
Modern Collection by Percy & Child.  
The Motherwell Collection.  
Wit and Mirth 1714, 1719.  
Pills tu Purge Melancholy 1684.

<sup>2)</sup> Langland C 7, 371.

<sup>3)</sup> Langland C, pass. XII. 35—39.

## On the Increase and Development of Beggary in England.

»Gif man cuman feormæd III niht an his âgenum hâme, cêpeman odde odderne, pe siô ofer mearce cuman, and hine ponne his mete fêde, and he ponne cœnigum mæn yfel gedô, se man pane ôderne cœt rihte gebrenge odde rihte gebrenge odde riht fore wyrce«. This is the first mention of vagabondage we know of. It is to be found in the »Hlodhæres and Eâdrîces dômas edited by Schmid, p. 15. And strange! the second law against beggars issued by Wihraêdi is directed against the tonsured monk roaming and begging in the country: »Gif bescoren man steôrleâs gange him an gest-lidnesse, gefe him man âenes, and pæt ne geweorde, buton he leâfnesse hæbbe, pæt hine man læng feormige«. (Schmid p. 16.)

Aedelstâne also published a law against those people »qui dominos non habent« which demands from »pære mægde, pæt hî hine tô folc-ryhte gehâmetten and him hlâford finden on folc-gemôte« (Schmid p. 133). Ethelred admonishes his people to be good and charitable towards the poor and not to annoy and torment aelpeôdige men and feorran cumone«. (Schmid p. 234.)

In the reign of Edward the Confessor the law regarding the harbouring of beggars became more elaborate. The principal item of this law was to the effect that if a man harboured a beggar for *more than two nights*, that beggar became one of the household and the master was held by law responsible for his acts: tuua nîcte geste pe pirdde nîcte acte agen hine«. (Schmid, 504.)

The Anglo-Saxon kings seem to have been rather kind and hospitable to the beggar; King Oswald became quite proverbial for his great charity.

There is no doubt that Cnut's law concerning the »freônd leâsan« (Schmid p. 292) also includes the beggar and vagabond: »let him submit to prison and there abide until he go to God's ordeal and let him fare as he may, if he be so distressed that he has no »borh at the frumtyht«.

But the beggar became ever more numerous and dangerous and we find William the Conqueror publishing a law to the effect that if a man harboured a beggar »ultra III nuis« that he became one of the household. (Schmid p. 330.)

Under Norman rule the law against the harbouring of vagrants and »frôendleâsen« was a repetition of the above. At the beginning of the Plantagenet period and all through the 12<sup>th</sup> century alms-giving to beggars was ordered by the church and many elaborate charities were established by the pious, such as the distribution of clothes and food on different saint's days.

Beggars were now very much on the increase, their favourable treatment serving rather to swell than diminish their ranks.<sup>1)</sup>

An enormous increase of beggary took place after the terrible Black Death (1348).<sup>2)</sup> Scarcity of labour and misery were the primary causes. The roads became infested and able-bodied men capable of work were found disguising themselves as cripples, often only awaiting an opportunity to spring upon and rob the unwary.

The beggar of this period was, from general account, a dangerous, cunning and ferocious individual, extorting alms from the passer by.

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<sup>1)</sup> Vide Robert Hitchcock's: »Polite Plat«. 1580. Arber's English Garland. Vol. II. p. 160.

<sup>2)</sup> Langland C 11, 272.

Strenuous laws now followed one after another, especially directed against the »able-bodied« beggar who refused to work. In the last year of King Edward III we find the Commons petitioning the king: »that Ribalds and sturdy Beggars may be banished out of every town«.

It was about this time that *Langland* wrote his celebrated: »Vision of Piers Ploughman« giving us a wonderful insight into the degradation, hypocrisy and habitual idleness of the beggar of that period.

Piers is of opinion that if the church would have lent its aid, begging would have been greatly reduced in England and that the indiscriminate charity given in atonement for sin was accountable for much un-necessary evil. (»And holychurche helpe to-so sholde no man begge«. Piers Ploughmann, Skeat's Edition 11. 184. C.)

In Richard II<sup>nds</sup> reign beggary and vagabondism became more and more rampant and an important law was passed making a distinction between »able-bodied« beggars and impotent ones. But in spite of law and statute nothing seems to have been strong enough to put down the ever increasing mob of mendicants and we find by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century that England is positively over-run with »feitors and vagrants«.

To get an idea of the great number of beggars and their doings in this and subsequent centuries we have only to look through the rolls and statutes levied against them in the reigns of Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth and James I<sup>st</sup> <sup>1)</sup>

The »wyuen pyne« or whipping post and the stocks were often their punishment v. Langland C 6. 131, 132. C. 3. 216. Persons deformed, diseased, or otherwise unfit for labour were allowed to beg on condition that they

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<sup>1)</sup> To be found in the »Acts of Parliament« in Elizabeth's reign Parliament Street and Mr. Ribton-Turners volume on »Vagrants and Vagrancy«.



provided themselves with a licence from the Justice of Peace or head of the city or borough to which they belonged, sealed by a »prod-homme«. Those found begging without license were stripped from the middle upwards, whipped and put into the stocks<sup>1)</sup>.

Edward VI<sup>th</sup> ordered vagabonds to be stamped on the breast with a V and to be made into slaves. Should the vagabond escape from his master he was to be branded on forehead and cheek with the letter S signifying slave; a cruel and painful law indeed, but when it is considered how these idle vagabonds were ruining England and making themselves a power<sup>2)</sup> in the land, it will be understood that extreme measures *had* to be resorted to. *Harrison* in his description of England in 1547 says:

. . . »Our third annoiers of the commonwealth are roges which doo verie great mischeefe in all places where they become. For there is not one yeare commonlie, where in three or four hundred of them are not eaten up by the gallows in one place and other. It appeareth by Cardane in the geniture of King Edward VI, how Henrie the eight, executing his laws verie severelie against such idle persons, I meane great thieves, pettie thieves and roges did hang up three score and twelve thousand of them in his time!«

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<sup>1)</sup> »In London and within a mile, I weane There are of jayles or prisons full eightene, And sixty whipping-posts, and stocks and cages Where sin, with shame and sorrow hath due wages«.

Taylor's Workes 1630.

»Beggars fear him more than the justice and as much as the whip-stock«  
Earle's Microcosmography p. 60. ed. Bliss.

Vide: Nares vol. II, p. 958.

Exact title of the book: *Earle's Microcosmography, or a Piece of the World discovered in Essays and Characters* 1628. Edit. Bliss. p. 60.

<sup>2)</sup> Who lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that Which they have given to beggars« *Shakespeare's* Coriolanus III. I.

In the year 1572 an act was passed declaring that »persons above the age of 14 being roges, vacabondes or sturdy Beggars are on conviction to bee grevousle whipped and burnte through the gristle of the right eare with a hot iron of the compasse of an inch about«.

But, in spite of all these measures, the irresponsible almsgivings of the age remained untouched and able-bodied, sturdy beggars continued to infest the country becoming a tax and a terror to the industrions part of the community.

The first real check to beggary came in the 43<sup>rd</sup> year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, just after the dissolution of the monasteries when an act was passed called an »Act for the Relief of the Poor«.

The purpose of this law was not only to relieve the indigent, but to prevent indigence itself. It guarded not alone against poverty and distress but also against vice and immorality. It recognized the right of destitute people to be maintained at the expense of the community and imposed upon each parish the supporting its own poor. It also ordered the erection of abiding places for the poor of the various parishes on wastes or commons, the origin of the English workhouses, but upon »sturdy beggars« the act had no mercy.

This act<sup>1)</sup> is always considered as the commencement of systematic dealing with the poor. It came but slowly into operation, in fact, it was centuries before anything like the present poor-law system in England was developed.

James Wright in his *Enactments regulating Players 1699*<sup>2)</sup> speaks of the law passed in Elizabeth's reign in which it seemed *actors* were classed as, or at any rate in the same company with, beggars and vagabonds. By

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<sup>1)</sup> The Acts of Parliament in Elizabeth's reign concerning beggars.

<sup>2)</sup> Arber's »British Garland«. Vol. II. p. 281.

this statute which was enacted for the suppression of Rogues, Vagabonds and sturdy beggars it was enacted:

»That all persons that be, or utter themselves to be Proctors, Procurers, Patent gatherers or Collectors for Coals, prisons or Hospitals, or Fencers, Bearwards; common Players of Interludes, and Minstrels wandering abroad, all Jugglers, Tinkers, Pedlers and Petty Chapmen etc., able in body, using loitering and refusing to work for such reasonable wages as is commonly given. These shall be adjudged and deemed Rogues, Vagabonds and sturdy beggars and punished as such.

In 1646 appeared a book entitled: »*Stanleyes Remedy*« or »*The way to Reform wandering Beggars, Thieves, Highway Robbers and Pick-pockets*«.

The following quotation furnishes an idea of the state of vagabondism at this period:

»The greate wickednesse of this kingdom which makes the kingdom not onely poor but also verie wicked, sheweth to be three sorts viz:

1. All sorts of roguish, wandering Vagrants.

2. All sorts of thieves, pick-pockets, etc.

3. All such houses as maintaine bawderie. It is throught by some wise counsellours of State that there are not so few as 80,000 Vagrants in this land that prey upon the common-wealth which loss being estimated comes to £ 1000 a day and there is left no way to reform them but by *setting them to worke*«.

This is the same advice already given nearly three hundred years before by Langland. The only difficulty was to *make* them work; having got accustomed to a life of jollity, ease and plenty, they preferred it to the hardship, privations and honesty of the labouring man.

Many efforts were set on foot to give the »sturdy« beggars an honest means of gaining their livings, but as soon as the cunning fellows found themselves in the

parish of such philanthropists they disappeared into another county.

*John Graunt*, writing in the year 1665 makes the following remarks about the Metropolitan beggar:

»My first observation is that few are starved. This appears for that of the 229,250 which have died during 20 years in London we find not above 51 to have been starved.

The observation which I shall add hereto is that the vast number of Beggars, swarming up and down the city, do all live and seem to be most healthy and strong». <sup>1)</sup>

Sir *Matthew Hale* in 1670 wrote a pamphlet entitled: »*And England's Weal and Prosperity Proposed*«. In this pamphlet he gives an excellent reason for the dislike and disability of the beggar to turn to an honest life:

»The children of the poor, »says he«, bred up in beggary and laziness do by that means become not only of unhealthy bodies and more than ordinary subject to loathsome disease; whereof very many die at their tender age and if they do arrive to years of strength they are by their idle habits contracted in their youth rendered for ever after indisposed to labour and serve only to stock the kingdom with thieves and beggars«.

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<sup>1)</sup> That beggars were often healthy bodied is witnessed too by Shakespeare Henry V. IV. II. »Cans't thou when thou commandst the beggar's knee. Command the health of it?«

## A Beggar's Life.

Then let the world us beggars call  
A Beggar's Life's the best of all.

So say the merry crew of Jovial Beggars in the poem found in the Roxburgh Collection 1661 and so are we all inclined to agree when perusing the reckless fun and jollity prevalent amongst beggars, during the Tudor and Stuart periods.

There was a time when the English beggar had only friends and defenders. Of how many an ancient ballad or legend is he the hero! Hale or hearty, or sick or needy, blind or lame, with wallet and staff, with dog and crutch, he was an essential figure in every landscape. He was one of the great sights of the metropolis. (Langland: C 1, 41 . .)

Let us hear what *John Taylor*<sup>1)</sup> has to tell us in praise of Beggary (1621).

A begger from an Antient house begins  
Old Adam's sonne and heire unto his sins  
And as our father Adam did possesse  
The world, there's not a Begger that hath lesse.  
For whereof is the world compact and fram'd,  
But elements, which to our sense are nam'd,  
The Earth, the Ayre, the Water and the Fire,  
With which all live, without which all expire.  
These every Begger hath in plenteous store,  
And every mighty monarch hath no more.

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<sup>1)</sup> The Praise, Antiquity and Commodity of Beggery, Beggars and Begging. 1621.

A prince (amidst his cares) may merry be,  
But yet a Begger is from flatt'ers free.  
A Duke is a degree magnificent,  
And yet a Begger may have more content  
An Earle an honourable house may keepe  
And yet a begger may more soundly sleep.

The rhapsody after many other delightful verses ends with these words:

Thus all degrees and states, what'e er they are  
With begger's happinesse cannot compare.

This idea of comparing the Beggar favourably with a noble person is also carried out in the poem: »There was a Joviall Begger«. (Wit and Drollery 1661.)

Of all occupations,  
A Beggar lives the best,  
For when he is weary  
He' ll lie him down and rest.

I fear no plots against me  
I live in open cell.  
Then who would be a King?  
When the Beggar's live so well.

In the ages of chivalry the beggar was treated with much respect and kindness.

It was looked upon as a part of religion to succour the needy; beggars were then less numerous and more worthy of charity.<sup>1)</sup>

The Anglo-Saxon monarchs were famous for their hospitality, beggars being received into their castles and regaled with food and drink. In Alfric's homily for the second Sunday after Pentecost the preacher, after dwelling on the story of Lazerous, who was spurned from the rich man's table, appeals thus to the Anglo-Saxon audience:

»Many Lazerouses you have now lying at yout gates begging for your superfluity«.

<sup>1)</sup> Arber, vol. V. Description of King James I welcome to London . . . Schmid. p. 235. (Lans of Aethelbred.)

As far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century we find the beggar maintained by law. An Anglo-Norman tract states that on the anniversary of Sir Hugh de Mortimers in the reign of King Stephen »a hundred poor persons were plentifully supplied, each having a loaf and two herrings because the anniversary happened in Lent. The other charities which he established for himself each day to beggars and strangers in the hostelry no man could number them«.<sup>1)</sup>

In the year 1363 we read that King Edward III introduced into England the practice of feeding, clothing and distributing money amongst the indigent poor on Maundy Thursday and this practice was followed by many successive sovereigns.

In the old play by *Thomas Nash* entitled: »*Sumner's last Will and Testament*«<sup>2)</sup> 1600 we find Ver addressing Summer quite eloquently on the subject of beggars.

»Tell me I pray«, says he, »wherefore was gold laid under our feet but that we should tread upon it? I will prove it that an unthrift comes nearest a happy man in as much as he comes nearest to Beggary. Now who doth so much ,vacare a rebus', who rests so much, who hath so little to do as a beggar? Who can sing so merry a note, as he that cannot change a groat? He that hath nothing wants nothing«.

In the same play Christmas says to Will Summer (P. 83. line 21.)

»I keep open house for all the beggars in some of my out yards«.

This practise of keeping open house for beggars was even practised by kings: John Saville in his *Description of King Jame's Entertainments*<sup>3)</sup> 1603 says that to begin with the ragged regiment and such as were debarred the privilege of any court, these were so sufficiently re-

<sup>1)</sup> Vide Ribton Turner's: »*Vagrants and Vagrancy*«. p. 105.

<sup>2)</sup> See Dodsley's *Old English Plays*. Vol. VIII. P. 28. l. 4.

<sup>3)</sup> From Arber's *English Garner*. Vol. V.

warded with beef, veal, mutton bread and beer, that »they sang holiday every day and kept a continual feast«.

We find William Langland in his »Vision of Piers Ploughman« 1362 exhorting the rich to give beggars assistance and tithes of their goods.

»By hus power, alle manere men in meschief yfalle;  
Fynde beggers bred backes for pe colde Tythen here goodes  
trewliche«. C. XIV. 70.

Beggars of this period were not bound to do penance nor fast at lent and were excused from various titles and other duties. (See Piers Ploughman. C. XIV. 78.)

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to further the comfort of mendicants, hospitals were erected and endowed which were also places of shelter and entertainment for the traveller or vagrant. One fourth of the church revenue was appropriated for the poor and with a portion of this money houses of charity were built and endowed.<sup>1)</sup>

In the ancient »Ballad of Hynd Horn«. (Child's Ballads. 5. 210. date about 1400) we find the Princess herself giving drink to the beggar from her hand:

»She went to the gate where the auld man did stand  
And she gave him a drink out of her own hand«.

The »Gaberlunzie Man« who arrives late at night at a cottager's house is at once given food and lodging (See Child's Ballads Vol. 9. p. 115 and Percy II 592) and in the Ballad of King Henry we see that even a monarch does not consider it beneath his dignity to afford shelter to a hideous and repulsive beggar-wench (Child's Ballads II. 297). The anecdote of good King Oswald is also well known. Whilst seated at dinner with his bishop he was told that there were many beggars at his gate. Rising instantly he commanded not only that his dinner should be divided amongst them, but that the very silver plate should be cut up and given to the most needy.

<sup>1)</sup> Vide Laws and Statutes from Elizabeth's reign. Parliament Street.



In the ballad entitled »The Bedfordshire Widow« (Rox. Coll. Vol. III. p<sup>t</sup> II. p. 443) we find Queen Mary II relieving a distressed woman by giving her money and clothing, and causing her children to be put out to nurse.

Thus far have we proved our beggar to be a jolly fellow and not by any means a bad one, content with his life and neither dangerous to the King or the community by whom he was succoured, respected, and relieved. There is alas! another side to the picture, a side which reveals to us such a history of idleness, villany and vice, such a breaking of laws and all standards of virtue that we must positively shudder at its perusal.

*Robert Copland* in his »Hye-Way to the Spyttelhouse«. 1534, gives rather a shocking picture of the beggars of his period.

Speaking of those gathered at the gate of the St. Bartholomew's Hospital he says. »They were people with bag and staff, crooked, lame and blind, scabby and scurvy, pockeaten both in flesh and skin, lousy and scald and bald as apes with scarcely a rag to cover them, breechless, barefooted, stinking with dirt, with a thousand tatters drabbling to the skirt. Boys, girls and lazy strong knaves shivering and distracted leaning on their staves and crying«.

Most of these illnesses the beggars brought on by themselves and it was not an uncommon practice for them to break the back or legs of their offspring or even voluntarily bring about blindness to attract the pity of the passer-by.

On the subject of this revolting cruelty of the beggar to his offspring Langland says:

»Thei wedde nonne womon that pei with delen,  
Bringep forth bastardes, beggers of kynde.  
Oper pe bak oper som bon pei breken of here children«.

This same idea is taken up by other old writers as, for instance, *Barclay* in his »*Ship of Fools*« ed. Jamieson's, 1. 304.

•Some other beggers falsely for the nonys  
Distygure theyr children, got wot, unhappely,  
Manglynge theyr facys. and brekyngge theyr bonys,  
To stere the people to pety that passe by;  
There stande they beggyngge with tedyous shout and cry,  
There owne bodyes tournynge to a strange fassion  
To move suche as passe to pyte and compassyon.

Shakespeare in King Lear II. IV says

•Fathers that wear rags  
Do make their children blind.

There is an interesting picture of the condition of begging in the year 1521 quoted by *Harman* at the burial of a man of »much worshyp in Kent«.

»There was such a number of beggars dwelling there abouts that unneth (scarcely) they might lie or stande aboute the House: then was there prepared for them a great and large barne and a great fat ox sod (boiled) out in Furmenty for them, with bread and drinke abundantly to furnish out the premisses; and every person had two pence, for such was the dole (wage). When night approached the wayfaring bold beggers remained alnight in the barne, and the same barne being serched with light in the night, seven score persons of men were told, every of them having his woman, except it were two women that lay alone together for some especyall cause. Thus having their mates to make merry withall, the buriall was turned to bowsing and belly chere (eating and drinking) morning to myrth, fasting to feasting. prayer to pastyme and pressing of papes, and lamenting to lechery«.

A loathsome picture indeed but less loathsome if possible than the recitation of this same *Harman* given in his »*Caveat of Common Cursetors*«. chap 24. p. 76:

»The beggers lodge a nights in barnes or backe houses. There the Mortes and Doxies (women beggars) shuffel-up a quayntitye of strawe or haye into some pretye corner of the barne where they may conveniently lye, and well shakethe the same, makinge the heade somewhat hye. then she layethe her petycote or cloke upon and over the strawe. Then she layeth her slate which is her sheete upon that; and maketh her ready and layeth her drouselye down.

The other sorte, that have no slates, but touble downe, and couche a hogshead in their clothes, these bee styl lousye, and shall never be without vermyne.<sup>1)</sup>

If the »*Upright Man*« come in where they lye, he hath his choyse, and crepeth in close by his Doxe: the »Roge« hath his leavings.

Sometyme shall come in some »Roge«, some Pyckinge Knave«, he walketh in softly a nights, when they be at their rest and plucketh off as many garmentes as be ought worth that he may come by«.

The saying »there's no honour among thieves« must have originated in this wise!

And now let us see how these beggars »these pestilent people« get their supper.

»They will of a night« says Harman boldlye drawe the latches of the door and go in when the good man with hys famyle be at supper, and syt downe without leave, and eate and drinke with them and either lye in the hall by the fyre all night or in the barn if there be no roome in the house for them.

<sup>1)</sup> Spcaking of the vermine in beggars, Shakespeare says. King Lear III. II

»The cod-piece that will house  
Before the head has any  
The head and he shall louse,  
So beggars marry many«.

*Heinsius* in 1634 wroote a book called »*Laus Pediculi*« diricted to the worshipfull Masters and Warders of Beggars Hall.



If the door be eyther bolted or lockt, they wyle break the same open to his farther cost. And in this barne sometyne do lye XL ,Upright men' together with their Doxies at one time. And this must the poore farmer suffer, or els they threaten to burne hime and all that he hath«.

This »Upright Man« who was a sort of king amongst the beggars, seems to have been the terror, not only of the honest cottager but also to those of the same calling as himself. He was allowed unlimited power and used this prerogative with tyranny and treachery.

I here give a quotation from *Martin Markall the Beadle of Bridewell in his »Denfense and answeere to the Belman of London 1610«*. A number of beggars have assembled together before a court of their own making to redress their grievances. The chief of this court is described as one of the »Congregation of Caterpillars, a ragged over-roasted Jacke of the Clocke-house with his crutch in his hand, a fierce face and filthy throat«.

The beggars all draw near with their grievances.

»Lord what a Companie of petitioners pressed to the barre to prefer their papers of injuries that were offred and done among themselves, here one complaines that hee could not travell safely nor cary any money without danger of the ,Upright Man' and ,Tinker' but that they would robbe and spoyle them of all that was ought about them; here another that they could not quietly take their rest in the night, nor keep his ,Autem' or ,Doxie' sole unto himselfe but that the ,Ruffler', ,Padder' or any ,Upright man' would take them away perforce.

These were generally the effect of their petitions but O! if a man were there to heare the noise, the clamour and bawling that was there amonge them, you would sure thinke that all the Dogges in Parish garden were broke loose and come there on purpose to yawle:

yea I think in my conscience; Cerberus that three-throat horrible hel-hound never kept a more dolefull, nor horryd noyse than those kennell of Clapperdungeons did at that time«.

At the end of the book by Martin Markale we found an interesting though scarcely comprehensible poem supposed to represent the wooing of two Maunders<sup>1)</sup> (borne and bred-up rogues) It is written in the native language of the beggar of that period:

•O Ben-Mort wilt thou pad with me  
One ben-slate shall serve both thee and me  
My *caster and commission* shall serve us both to maund.  
My bong, my loure and fambling cheates  
Shall be at thy command.

O Ben Cove that may not be,  
For thou hast an Autem Mort who ever that is she  
If that she were dead and binged to his long Libb  
Then would I pad and maund with thee,  
And wap and for thee fib«.

This mention of the *caster and commission* probably refers to a *licence* without which no beggar was allowed to ask for alms at that period under penalty of being »grevousle whipped, and burnte through the gristle of the right Eare«.

This licensing of beggars was in many cases a most disastrous affair for, like the royal stamp on quack medicines, it made worthy men out of the greatest rogues.

*Harrison*, in his famous description of Britain (1586) laments strongly that »no beggar can be taken as an idle person or a rogue who has a sufficient licence«.

A *licence* to beg in all countries was the regular pensioning-off for maimed soldiers or sailors and one of the most amusing passports of this kind was given by

<sup>1)</sup> Skeet Notes on English Etymology p. 182.

<sup>2)</sup> Vide Chap. on Beggar's terms. p. 77.

Philip Duke of Brabant in 1427 to one Otto Canolent, his wife, children, brothers, sisters and some of his scholars, to beg in all his States.

The following is the copy of a license to an Impotent beggar to beg. Date about 1530.

»Kanc s. s. Memorand that A. B. of Dale for reasonable considerâcons ys lycensed to begge wythin the Hundred of P. K. and L in the sayde countie, yoven under the seale of that lymytte, Tali die and anno.«

We have found still another poem besides »O Ben Mort« written in beggar language. It is from the »English Rogue« London 1665. It is exceedingly difficult of comprehension.

»Bien Darkmann's then, Bouse Mort and Ken,  
The bien Coves brings awast,  
On Chates to trine by Rome Coves dine  
For his long lib at last.  
Bing'd out bien Morts and toure and toure,  
Bing out of the Rome vile bine  
And toure the Cove that cloy'd your duds,  
Upon the Chates to trine«.

In the poem »The Beggar-Boy of the North« (Rox. Coll. vol. 3 p. 323) we come across many cant expressions of the beggar which have only been explained by a special study of Harman, Dekker and other writers upon that subject. The passages in which the curious terms occur are worth quoting:

»My father, my mother, my gransire and grannum  
My uncles, my aunes and all my kindred  
Did maund for loure, casum and pannum  
(beg for money, cheese and bread.)  
Then wherefore should I from the trade be hindred?  
Cat will be kind, the proverbe doth say;  
Tis pity old customs should be broken;  
Still as I wander along on the way,  
I'le cry; Good your worship,<sup>1)</sup> bestow one token!

---

<sup>1)</sup> »Good your worship« seems the regular cry of the beggar of that period as: »Please kind Sir« is of this. In »The London Chan-

Although in a *quier-ken* (prison) I have been oft.  
And by the *rumcoe* (jailor) and the *harmanbecke* (policeman)  
frighted

Yet my old trade I will set aloft  
Wherein all my lineage have chiefly delighted  
I have eat shame and drunke after the same,  
I little regard what to me is spoken  
Loud in the streets my mind I proclaime,  
And cry Good your worship bestow one token.

It will be seen by the above poems that the beggar had a vocabulary quite his own, probably used intentionally to dupe the unsuspecting.

*Thomas Dekker* in his »*Belman of London*« (1608) brings to light a good many of the secret vocabularies and secret dealings of the beggars of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

He tells us that the eleven following »secret villanies« are practised by the vagabond.

|                            |                  |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| Cheating Law               | Bernard Law      |
| Vincent's Law              | The Black Art    |
| Curbing Law                | Prigging Law     |
| Lifting Law                | High Law         |
| Sacking Law                | Frigging Law and |
| Five Jumpes at Leape-frog. |                  |

Dekker also gives us an account of a feast in which were present all kinds of vagabonds. He was conveyed to this feast by an »old nimble-tong'd beldam« where, from an upper loft he could unseen peep through a wooden lattice at the proceedings.

»The whole assembly being gathered together one amongst the reste tooke upon him a seniority over the rest and charged every man to answer to his name to see if the jury were full. The Bill, by which hee meant to call them being a double Jug of ale (that had the spirit of Aquavita<sup>e</sup> in it, it smelt so strong.) Another stan-

ticleers« a play written in 1659 Bristle says: »Thou believest that more may be gotten with a: »Good your Worship, than a »Sirrah deliver your purse!«

ding by with a toast, nutmeg and ginger ready to cry. ,Vous avez' as they were cal'd; and all that were in the room had single pots by the eares, which, like Pistols, were charged to goe 'off so soone as ever they heard their names.

This ceremony being set a-foot an O yes was made«.

The principal of the feast who is called »The Captain of the Tatterdemalions »spies out one who has never yet served in »those lowsie warres«. This young novice is then »stalled to the rogue«, instructed in his duties and taught the names and degrees of the fraternity of Vagabonds. After this comes the feast and a speech in praise of Beggery and then the company depart.

Thomas Harman (1567) gives us an insight into the »severall disorders and secret degrees amongst idle vagabonds«.<sup>1)</sup>

- |                          |                                           |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 1. Rufflers.             | 9. Abrams.                                |
| 2. Uprightmen.           | 10. Freshwater Mariners-<br>or Whipiacks. |
| 3. Hookers.              | 11. Drummerers.                           |
| 4. Roges.                | 12. Drunken Tinkers.                      |
| 5. Wild Roges.           | 13. Swadders or Pedlars.                  |
| 6. Priggers of Prancers. | 14. Tarkemen or Patricoes.                |
| 7. Palliards.            |                                           |
| 8. Fraters.              |                                           |

Of women-kinde.

- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Demanders for glimmar<br>or fire. | 5. Walking Mortes.  |
| 2. Baudie Baskets.                   | 6. Doxies.          |
| 3. Mortes.                           | 7. Delles.          |
| 4. Autem Mortes.                     | 8. Kinching Mortes. |
|                                      | 9. Kinching Coves.  |

Now these Roges, Upright Men etc. etc. were by no means what we picture beggars should be, that is decrepit, feeble and old, unable to labour and consequently forced,

<sup>1)</sup> »A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursetors, vulgarly called Vagabones«. see p. 43.



by adverse circumstances, to implore assistance of the charitable — on the contrary — they were generally a set of idle, thieving, able-bodied men who took to begging as being an easier and more profitable trade than working.

Piers Ploughman (1362—93) collects together a number of such sturdy beggars and sets them to work giving them meat for their pains, but knowing the character of his workmen he suspects that as soon as they have filled themselves they will work no more so he appeals to the mythological »Hunger« to give him advice. Hunger bids him feed these able-bodied beggars with horses bread and beans and *force* them to work. (Vision of Piers Ploughman IX 192. c.) This horses-bread must have been very unpalatable fare, by the way, for the beggar who was accustomed to live on the fat of the land, who drunk »of browned ale« with fresh flesh, fried fish and finest bread.

»Mai no peny ale hem paye ne no pece of Bacun Bote hit weore Fresch Flesch or elles Fisch Frizet«. (Vision of Piers Ploughman. Skeats ed. a. VII. 297.)

The beggar of that period seems to have possessed many strange devices for attracting attention, Stationing themselves at a wayside cross they would importunately entreat alms for Christ's sake, holding out meanwhile a *clack-dish*<sup>1)</sup> or *alms basket* with a *clapper*. These *clack-dishes*<sup>2)</sup> were first employed by *leper* beggars lest their touch should pollute the benevolent, but were later generally adopted. In old plays and ballads we find frequent allusions made to the beggar's clapper. »I would my clapper hung in his baldrick. Ah what a peal I could ring«. (Fletcher's Beggar's Bush Act IV. Sc. I.) Again

<sup>1)</sup> »And his use was to put a ducket in her »clack-dish« (see also p. 83) Measure for Measure III 3.

<sup>2)</sup> The clap-dish is still used by a society of widows who subsist in alm's-houses, without the gate of York, called Micklegate Bar. Vide: »Nare's Glossary«. I. 164.

in the »*Bagford Ballads*« we find a husband saying to his wife who is not contented: »to keep her clapper still«.

Many beggars in the 14<sup>th</sup> century seem to have been idiotic or lunatic wandering far and wide and uttering prophecies. Langland speaks of these men as »God's Minstrels« and he begs men to be charitable to them and give them of their gold:

»Gyunn hem gyftes of gold for grete lorde's sake«.  
(*Vision of Pier's Ploughman*. Skeats Ed. X 165. c.)

*Shakespeare* in his *King Lear* also makes mention of beggary attached to lunacy.

»Madman and beggar too«. (*King Lear* IV. I). And again: (*Lear* II. III.)

•The country gives me proof and precedent  
Of Bedlam beggars, who with roaring voices,  
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms  
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;  
And with this horrible object from low farms;  
Sometimes with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers.  
Enforce their charity.«

Beggars, as we have before mentioned, have been often made the heroes of ballad and story but they have found just as many denouncers as defenders.

Sir *John Cheke* in his »*Hurt of Sedicion*« is no admirer of the vagabond. (1549.)

»What say ye to the numbres of vagabondes and loitring beggars which wyl swarme in every corner of the realme and not only lie loytering under hedges, but also stande sturdely in cities and begge boldly at every dore, leaving labour which they like not and folowing idleness which they should not? Worke is undone at home and loiteres linger in the stretes, lurk in ale houses, range in highwaies, valiaunte beggers play in tounes contenting themselves better with idle beggery than with honest labour. And what more noisom beastes be in a

comune wealth? Dranes in hives sucke oute the honie, a smal matter, but yet to be loked on by good husbandes, caterpillars destroye the fruite. Diverse vermine destroye corne.

*But what is a loyterer?* A sucker of honye, a spoyler of corne, a destroyer of fruite, a sucker of bloud, a queller of lyfe, a basiliske of the comune-wealthe, which by companie and syght doth poyson the whole contreye and staineth honeste myndes with the infection of his venime and so draweth the comune-wealthe to deathe and destruction«.

We will conclude this chapter with a few of the most celebrated quotations found in old poems concerning a beggar's life.

•A Beggar, a beggar, a beggar I'll be<sup>1)</sup>  
There's none leads a life more jocund than he,  
A beggar I was and a beggar I am  
A beggar I'll be, from a beggar I came  
If as it begins our tradings do fall,  
We in the conclusion shall beggars be all.  
A Craven my Father, a Maunder my Mother,  
A Filer my Sister, a Filcher my brother,  
A Canter my Unkle, that car'd not for Pelf,  
A Lifter my Aunt and a Beggar myself,  
In white wheaten straw when their Belly's were full  
Then I was got between a Tinker and a Trull.  
And therefore a Beggar, a Beggar I'll be  
For there's none leads a life more jocund than he.

In the Bagford Ballads. Book I. p. 194 we find the following. Also to be seen in the Motherwell Edition:

•Chance feeds us, chance leads us  
Round the land in jollity  
Rag-dealing, nag-stealing,  
Everywhere we roam,  
Brass mending, ass vending,

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<sup>1)</sup> From Playford's Pills to Purge Melancholy 1600. Also in Bagford Coll. II. 58.

Happier than the quality  
Swipes soaking, pipes smoaking,  
Ev'ry barn a home.

Tink, Tink, a tink a tink  
Our life is full of fun, boys,  
Clink tink, a tink, a tink,  
Our busy hammers ring.  
Clink tink, a tink a tink  
Our job will soon be done boys  
Then tune we merrily  
The bladder and the string.\*

In the Joviall Beggar's Merry Crew we find the following (Bagford Ballads p. 877. 1678.)

•When Beggars that have coyn good store  
yet still like vagrants live  
They do but only cheat the poor,  
'tis pittty them to give.

There was a jovial Beggar bold  
Who often lodged in the cold  
He fram'd himself a Wooden Leg  
Which Pitty mov'd as he did Beg;  
And mournfully he did complaine,  
That from his Cradle he was Lame  
But tho 'the world us Beggars call,  
A Beggars Trade's the best of all.

Other folks Children we do take  
And for them beg for pittty's sake;  
But such deceitful Knaves we be,  
We speak not one word true in three:  
And tho' like Beggars we do live  
Our lives to us contentment give  
Then let the world us Beggars call,  
A Beggar's Life's the best of all.

With this last jovial strain ringing in our ears we will conclude our chapter.

## Characteristics of the Beggar of Old England.

### 1. His Riches.

»If I want gold, steal but a beggars dog,  
And give it Timon, why, the dog coins gold.  
Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* II. I.

To talk of a beggar being rich seems like a contradiction in terms, yet, in the Middle Ages we hear so continually of »bags of gold« and »stores of plenty« in connection with the vagrant that we are inclined to think he had a more agreeable time than many a worthy member of society.

*Robert Copland* in his *»Hye-way to the Spyttle house«* 1534 tells us that as he was walking to St. Paul's Church beggars sat on each side of the way. An honest man had compassion on one of the beggars and immediately he was gone, the lusty fellow pulled out elevenpence and declared it had been an unprofitable day. Now as one penny in those days equals a shilling in ours we may believe that begging was a more lucrative and less exacting occupation than working and consequently we must not be astonished at the vast number of able-bodied men who took to this profession.

In the old English Ballads frequent mention is made of the beggar's riches. Are we not told, for instance, that the »Blind Beggar of Bednal Green«, was richer than all the knights who sued for his daughter's hand?

The beggar says:

»If my gold may better her birth  
And equall the gold that you lay on the earth  
Then neyther rayle, nor grudge you to see  
The blind beggars' daughter a lady to bee«.

The beggar's gold outweighing all the rest, his daughter is married sumptuously.

From hunger and cold who lives more free  
Or who more richly clad than we?  
Our bellies are full our flesh is warm  
And against pride our rays are a charm  
Enough is our feast and for to-morrow  
Let rich men care we feel no sorrow.

Thus sing *Brome's Merry Beggars*. Poverty, hardships and privations are as little known to this jovial crew as to the richest of the land.

When »Little John« goes a-begging<sup>1)</sup> he makes friends with a number of mendicants who don't care for his company. One of them begins to fight with »Little John« whereupon he seizes upon the beggar's bag which he finds full of money.

The »bag full of money«, seems to be the usual booty of the mendicant.

*Robin Hood* encountering a beggar with such a »sac« demands him to unloosen the strings and divide with him his gold, but the beggar is a crafty fellow and raising his staff he gives such lusty blows to Robin that he falls down in a swoon.

When Robin revives, he dispatches three men after the rich and cunning mendicant, but they fare no better, for the beggar instead of giving up his money takes a bag of meal and flings it into their eyes.<sup>2)</sup>

Stowe, the Chronicler was granted by the King a licence for begging in return for his literary service. He must have been a rich beggar indeed for history relates that, at his death his wife erected him a memorial which cost the considerable sum of £ 500.

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<sup>1)</sup> »Little John a-begging«. From Evans' old Ballads 1777.

<sup>2)</sup> »Robin Hood and the Beggar«. Aberdeen. Old Ballad. Printed for A. Kuth. 1810.

The beggar's wallet seems always to have been full of something good, if not always of gold at any rate of food and drink.

In »The Knight and the Beggar Wench (See Roxburgh Collection) we read that the Wenches sack was well furnished with bread and cheese and also with »pig and pudding and pie«.

An interesting anecdote concerning beggars riches is related by H. Peacham in »The Worth of a Penny« 1641 (See Arber's English Garner Vol. VI. p. 279.) A rich usurer, who made it his custom to travel in ragged clothes and beg his way was so well known that some thieves took notice of him. They found little store of gold in his pockets but a great black pudding in one end of which his gold was hidden. The beggar pleading hunger begged the thieves to give him half of the pudding back again, which they granted, but he, finding it to be the wrong end, desired them to give some of the fat in their end to his lean. »No you rogue«, said the thieves! you have had your cut already, you shall not have a crumb more«.

The riches of Clause, King of the Beggars in »Beggar's Bush« (Fletcher) may be gathered from the following passage *Act IV. Sc I.* wherein his friend Goswin, Merchant of Bruges appeals to him for help:

*Clause:* »Tis there, your full sum a hundred thousand crowns:

And good sweet master now be merry.

*Goswin:* Good Clause,

How camest thou by this mighty sum?

*Clause:* Fear not: you have it by as honest means  
As though your father gave it. Sir you know not  
To what a mass the little we get daily,  
Amounts in seven years«.

Langland in speaking of the life of beggars in the 14<sup>th</sup> century gives the following description which savours more of richness than poverty. »They fill their bags and stomachs with lies sitting at night over a hot fire where they untie their legs which have been bound up in the daytime and lying at ease, roasting themselves over the coals, and turning their back to the heat, drinking gallantly and deep, after which they draw to bed and rise when they are in the humour. Then they roam about and keep a fast look out where they may soonest get a rasher of bacon, a loaf or a thick bit of cheese which they carry to their own cabin and contrive to live in idleness and ease by the labours of other men«.

(See William Langland's Vision of Piers Ploughman 1362. Text C. Passus X. 140—152.

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## 2. Change of Garb.

•Contempt and Beggary hangs upon thy back«.  
Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet V. I.

The »change of garb« plays an important rôle in many beggar ballads. We find knights dressing themselves as beggars to test the loyalty of their lady-loves, notorious highwaymen donning the wallet, staff and rags so as to hide their personalities and escape from justice, enemies of princes or kings, obtaining entry into their castles through impersonating lame or blind vagrants and we even read of »professional imposters«; two ancient woodcuts in the Bagford Ballads represent a certain Nicholas Blunt in his holiday attire when he lived as a hale and hearty gentleman and in his counterfeit rags showing a sick man under the alias Nicholas Ganynges.



*Hind Horn*<sup>1)</sup> the Knight after having been absent for seven years from his fiancée, the king's daughter, returns suddenly home. An old beggar whom he meets on the road tells him that his fiancée is about to wed another, whereupon Hind Horn determines to test her faith and changes clothes with the beggar:

Will you lend me your begging coat  
And I'll lend you my scarlet cloak?

Will you lend me your beggar's rung  
And I'll gie you my steed to ride upon.

Will you lend me your wig o'hair,  
To cover mine, because it is fair?

*Robin Hood*, the famous outlaw of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in order to pursue his plunders in Nottingham exchanges his horse and finery for a beggars rags and bags.<sup>2)</sup>

In the »*Jolly Beggar*« supposed to have been written by James V of Scotland we read of a noble lord disguised as a beggar who goes to a cottage one night and asks for food and rest. He gets a good bed of straw which is laid before the fire. When the farmer's daughter goes at nightfall to bar the door the beggar tempts her to come and sleep with him and she consents. In the morning he blows his horn and four — and — twenty knights come to wait upon him. He then discloses his personality to the maiden and tells her that if she had been a virtuous woman he would have married her and given her nine castles.<sup>3)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Hind or Hynde Horn is one of the most ancient ballads the English possess, probably the work of a popular jongleur or vagrant minstrel. Its date is probably the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is valuable as illustrative of the history of romantic ballad. To be found in Motherwells and Child's Editions.

<sup>2)</sup> »Robin Hood and the Beggar«. Child's Ballads Part. III. book V. This Ballad was first printed in 1795 by Ritson, but the whole poem of Robin Hood dates back probably to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3)</sup> This ballad was taken down by Baring-Gould from the singing of a labourer on Dartmoor. It is to be found in Child's and Herd's Collections.

The »*Gaberlunzie Man*« arrives at night time tattered and torn and implores thee good wife of the cottage to have pity on him. She does so and immediately the beggar falls in love with her daughter. They agree to run off together in the night.

Next morning the farmer's wife perceives that the straw of the beggar's bed is cold, but as he has stolen nothing, she declares him to be a »leal poor man«. When, however, she discovers the loss of her daughter she cries out in despair:

»She's aff with the Gaberlunzie Man«. Later on in the ballad she is consoled, for her daughter pays her a visit »wi a bairn in her arms and ane in her wane«, but for all that a very fine lady with men and maid-servants at her command.<sup>1)</sup>

Almost the same incident is mentioned in the »*Beggar Laddie*«. The pretended beggar induces a young lady to follow him as his beggar-lassie. In spite of all the troubles that a vagrant's life opens before her she consents to his suit whereupon her faithful love is speedily rewarded. The beggar conducts her to his father's hall, where four and twenty men wait upon him and the lassie becomes a great lady (Child's Ballads. Vol. 9. An old ballad descended to us from recitation)

Robin Hood in the ballad relating to his rescuing of three squires, dons a beggar's attire in order to obtain admittance to the palace of the Sheriff of Nottingham, and his faithful attendant »Little John« intending to go a-begging induces an old mendicant to change clothes with him and give him hints how he must conduct himself.<sup>2)</sup>

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<sup>1)</sup> The »*Gaberlunzie Man*«, related in Child's Ballads vol. 9. p. 115. James V of Scotland is said to be the author and hero of the poem.

<sup>2)</sup> »Robin Hood rescuing three squires« and »Little John a-begging«, are both printed by Ritson 1795 and mentioned in Child's Ballads.

### 3. The Beggar as a News-Messenger.

In the Middle Ages of England when railways were unknown and the roads generally in a very imperfect condition the vagrant was a person of no small importance for carrying news from one district to another.

In our old ballads we are continually coming across allusions to this mission of the beggar. The knight or squire, arriving after absence near to his estate generally asks: What news? of the first beggar he meets on the highroad.

When »*The Bailiffs Daughter of Islington*« attired as a beggar, implores alms of her lover whom she sees riding along, almost his first question is:

»What news, what news from Islington«? Hind Horn, leaving the sea and coming to land asks the same question of an old beggar-man.

»No news said the beggar no news at a',  
But there is a wedding in the king's ha'«

In *Johnny Cock* again we find the foresters enquiring news of the palmer.

»What news, what news? say the Seven Foresters.  
What news have ye brought to me?  
I have no news the palmer said  
But what I saw with my 'ee.«

It was this particular characteristic in the beggar which made him such a welcome companion in the wayside ale-houses. If there was news to relate he invariably gave it in a highly-coloured style, if none, he invented a string of lies. Certain it is, that on the many occasions in which the beggar figures as a news-messenger, in story, song, ballad and drama, he makes as much mischief out of his information as possible, he is, in fact an inveterate scandal-monger!<sup>1)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Diccon in »Gammer Gurtons Nedle«. Manly: Specimens of the Pre-Shaahesp. Drama. Vol. II. p. 93. . . .

#### 4. Beggars and Forest-Life.

In almost all the beggar plays and poems of England we find mention of the free and easy life of the forest, in fact, the forest was a regular asylum for robbers, bandits and vagrants escaping from the law. (Schmid p. 429.)

England must have once been plentifully covered with woodland and the poet was not slow to seize upon such localities in which to place some of his most beautiful and sometimes most desperate scenes. The rustling of the trees and murmur of the stream form an accompaniment to the tender yow of the lover or the ribald jest of the vagrant: hips, haws and acorns are oftentimes their food and their bed is of dried grass or weeds.

In »*King Orfeo*«, we see the once rich and happy monarch wandering about the woods as a beggar for ten long years. His clothes hang about him, his food is the wild berries and his only solace his harp to whose sweet strains the birds and beasts flock round in rapture.

All the poems connected with Robin Hood such as *Robin Hood and the Beggar*, *Little John a-begging* etc. are carried on in the depths of the forest glades. These men literally dwelt in the underwood finding in their fastnesses almost as much safety from the punishment of their misdeeds as if they had escaped to the continent.

*King Lear*, after having begged in vain from his worthless daughters retreats broken-hearted into »the grene wode«.

In the *Stout Cripple of Cornwall*<sup>1</sup>) we have a legend connected with the forest of a less romantic description. In this ballad is shown the nimble dexterity of a lame beggar who, to escape the hand of justice, flies to the woods where, by the help of a pair of stilts he manages to outstrip his pursuers.

<sup>1</sup> Roxborough Coll.

*The West-Country Damosel's Complaint* is perhaps one of the most thrilling and pathetic ballads connected with forest life. The poor girl, forsaken by her lover betakes herself to the forest to mourn out her life in sorrow. Her rich sister's house is on the border of the wood whither she goes in her worn clothes to beg for alms. The sister refuses to succour her and she dies broken-hearted in the forest glade.\*)

In *Johnny Cock, The Poor Man of Essex and the Devil* and *the Legend of Sir Guy* we also find mention of woodland life and scenery. Martin Markall, Beadle of Bridewell in his valuable old book date 1610, makes the following entry:

»Jack Mendall, a sturdie vagabond, despairing of succours and fearing the reward of his lewd dealings fled away into the woods.

But Proclamation made, that whosoever could bring Jacke alive or dead to the King should have a thousand Markes for his paines, was after slaine by a Gentleman in Kent and so brought to the King«.

## 5. Their Cunning and Craftiness.

»Thou art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch«.

Lear II. 2.

The cunning, lying, tricks and deceptions of the beggar of old England are never shown up better than in *John Awdeley's* famous »*Fraternitie of Vagabondes*« published in 1561.

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<sup>1)</sup> The Ballads mentioned in this chapter are to be found in Child's collection of English and Scottish Ballads, except the »Stout Cripple of Corawall« and the »Poor man of Essex«. (Roxb. collect.) etc.

The printer begins by telling the reader in poetry how he became acquainted with the secrets which he discloses:

•This brotherhood of Vacabondes  
To shew that there be such indeede  
Both Justices and men of Landes,  
Wyll testifiye it if it neede  
For at a Sessions as they sat,  
By chaunce a Vacabond was got.  
  
Who promysde if they would him spare  
And keepe his name from knowledge then  
He would as straunge a thing declare  
As euer they knew since they were men  
,But if my fellowes do know (sayd he)  
That thus I dyd, they would kyll me'.  
  
The graunting him this his request  
He dyd declare, as here is read,  
Both names and states of most and least  
Of this their Vacabondes brotherhood.  
Which at the request of a worshipful man  
I have set it forth as well as I can.

This »Vacabondes Brotherhood« or Beggars Commonwealth was presided over by a sort of king called the »*Upright Man*«.<sup>1)</sup> This man went about with a particular kind of staff which was called a Filtchman. He had such unbounded authority over other beggars that on meeting one of his profession he could call him to account and make him share his gains. He could also steal from them their women and they had no remedy against him, even though he beat them. He was a source of terror and hatred to the other beggars as we have shown in other parts of our article.<sup>2)</sup> He had the chief place at any market, fair, highway or other walk and was not one to be controlled.

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<sup>1)</sup> A good idea of the importance of the »Upright Man« and the way he is chosen is given in Fletcher's Beggars Bush Act I. Sc. II.

<sup>2)</sup> Vide p. 17.

After the »*Upright Man*« in importance seems to have come the »*Abraham Man*«. This rogue walked about bare-armed and bare-legged, carrying with him a pack of wool or a stick with bacon on it so that people might think him mad. He called himself »*Poore Tom*«. (Edgar in King Lear IV. 1.)

A *Ruffeler* was one who went about with a weapon to seek service. He pretended that he had served in the wars and begged for his relief, but his chief trade was to rob poor wayfaring men and market women.

A *Prygman's* vocation seems to have been to steal poultry and filch away clothes. These men were also known as *Back or Belly-Cheats*. *Dommerers* pretended to have their tongues cut out or to have been born deaf and dumb. They turned the tips of their tongues into their throats and with a stick made them bleed.

Amongst *women beggars* the most important sects were *Kitchen Mortes* or *Dells* and *Doxies*. The former were young wenches who had not lost their virginity, of which the Upright Man had a right to the enjoyment. After this they were used in common by the whole fraternity. *Doxies* were common strumpets who went about selling laces or shirt-strings.

This list which we have derived from Awdeley, Harman, Dekker, Theobald and Bailey finishes up by what is called a »*Patriarke Co.*« The definition of which we give in Awdeley's own words.

»A Patriarke Co. do make marriages and that is untill death depart the married folke, which is after this sort. When they come to a dead Horse or any dead Catell, then they shake hands and so depart ewry one of them a seuerall way«. <sup>1)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Did Shakespeare have this custom in mind when he asks in »*Much Ado about Nothing*«. »Is not Marriage honourable in a beggar«. (III. 4.)

Again in King Lear III. 2. he says:

»So beggars marry many«.

What a disclosure! And what a company of liars and hypocrites! We see them all before us: the Abraham-Man with his stick and bacon, feigning madness, the counterfeit soldier who under disguise of having done service to his country now robs the poor, the Ruffeler filching chickens and clothes and then gambling away his ill-gotten gains in the Bowsynge Inn; the Upright Man reigning tyrannically over his wretched subjects beating them, stealing from them and corrupting their wives and daughters; and then the female crew who have lost all femininity and virtue: the Doxies, Kitchen Mortes and Althams, the whole lawless list concluding with that clause concerning the breaking of the marriage vow over a dead horse or cow.

Well can we understand that with such a crew pervading the streets and high ways travelling was rendered dangerous and England being seriously undermined in her constitutions. The strenuous laws which followed upon each other at these times cannot astonish us, nor is it fair to call these laws cruel, although the brandishing with hot irons was one of its clauses.

During the Tudor and Stuart periods law after law was passed, but the beggar with his cunning and craftiness managed to elude the eye of justice and he not only increased and multiplied, but continued to live prosperously.

The Lord Treasurer in 1596<sup>1)</sup> tells us how there were assembled sixty beggars in a company which stole a whole cart-load of cheeses; he says further that the beggars live idly in the ale-houses, day and night eating and drinking excessively and »within these three months«, he continues, »I took a beggar that confessed unto me that he and two more lay in an ale-house three weeks, in which they eat 20 fat sheep; whereof they stole every night one!«<sup>1)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Vide Edward Hext's letter to the Lord Treasurer on the State of Vagrancy 1596.



William Langland speaking about the sloth and gluttony of the beggar of the 14<sup>th</sup> century says:

»Bydders and Beggars faste aboute goden  
Tyl hure bagge and hure belly were bretful ycrammyed,  
Faytynge for hure fode and fouhten atten ale  
In glotenye (got wot) goth they to bedde,  
And arysep with ribaudrie tho Roberdes knaves  
Slep and synful sleuthe seweth suche euere«.

(Vision of Piers Ploughman C. 1. 41—46 Skeat's Ed.)

Such gluttony and idleness was naturally bad for England and many good men tried to quell these qualities in the vagrant by offering him honest work.

We are told that a Warwickshire gentleman, a certain W. Harman, seeing his parish to be pestered exceedingly with sturdy beggars ordered that they should be all sent to him to work. He then gave them food, drink and wages. As soon as all the rest of the wandering beggars heard of this they instantly left the parish in fear they should be treated in like manner. *William Turner in 1555* gives us also a striking picture of the perverse propensities of the beggar.

»When of late years I practised bodily phisicke in Englande«, says he, »divers sick beggars came unto me and not knowyng that I was a physician asked of me myne almose. To whom I offered to heale their diseases for Godde's sake. But they went by and by awaye from me and wolde have none of that. For they had much lever be sick with ease and ydelness than to be hole, and with great payne and laboure to earn honestly theyr lyuing«.

*Robert Hitchcock* who wrote his *Polite Plat in 1580*<sup>1)</sup> is another philanthropist though we fear his scheme for ridding England of beggars was scarcely practical. After speaking of the growing number of beggars with their

<sup>1)</sup> See Arber's: »English Garner«. Vol. II. p. 160.

»dicing, cosening, picking of purses and robbing« he suggests that this »perilous state and imminent danger may be averted by placing twelve of them in every fishing-ship« who, when they shall find that their diet for the whole year is provided and that two voyages every year will yield to every man for his pains twenty pounds clear . . . »they will be glad to continue this good and profitable vocation and shun the others«.

Robert Hitchcock, in suggesting *work* as a remedy for beggary, seems to forget that their besetting sin was a love of idleness.

H. Peacham in his: »*Worth of a Penny*<sup>1)</sup> 1641 tells us a good and authenticated story on this subject.

A proper young man begging of a gentleman in Oxfordshire, the gentleman chid him and told him that a man of his youth and limbs might be ashamed to beg. Whereupon the beggar said that he was troubled with a bad disease of which he was ashamed.

The gentleman giving him two-pence (equal to six pence now) and riding forward sent his man back to know what his disease was. The beggar refused to tell him, but being threatened to be cudgelled he told the serving-man in plain English that: »his disease was Idleness by some men called Sloth«.

In the old play<sup>2)</sup>: »*A Merry Knack to Know a Knave*. 1594 a beggar enters on the scene and beseeches the priest to give him one penny. The Priest answers:

»Fie upon thee, lazy fellow, art thou not ashamed to beg? Read the blessed saying of St Paul, which is, thou shalt get thy living by the sweat of thy brow, and he that will not labour is not worthy to eat«.

A very favourite practise amongst the beggars of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the making of artificial illnesses

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<sup>1)</sup> See Arber's »English Garner«. Vol. IV. p. 285.

<sup>2)</sup> See Dodsley's Old English Plays. VI. p. 578.

and diseases<sup>1)</sup> so as to illicit sympathy. *Robert Copland* in his »Hye way to the Spyttelhouse 1534« says: »Some beggarly churls go on crutches to each market and so dissimulate as false, thieving flowches, with bloody clouts about their legs and plaisters on their skins, some counterfeited leprosy and others put soap in their mouths to counterfeit foam and fall down as if the had St Cornelius's evil«. In *Rowley's play*. »*A Woman never Vext*<sup>2)</sup> 1632«.

Stephen says to Robert:

»Why I'll beg for thee boy  
I'll break his leg and bind it up again  
To pull out pity from a strong breast,  
Rather than thou shalt want«.

Foster who is on the scene replies:

»Ay do; let him sear up his arm and scarf it up  
With two yards of rope; counterfeit two villains;  
Beg under a hedge and share your bounty«.

In Act II Sc 1. of the *Beggar's Bush* (Fletcher). Prigg makes frequent allusion to the beggar's arts of manufacturing illnesses. (Vide also Langl. C 10, 98. 166 C 9, 128.) We now come to another characteristic of the beggar. viz. *Lying*. Shakespeare in his *Cymbeline* III. 6 says: »Two beggars told me I could not miss my way. Will poor folks lie that have afflictions on them?« William Langland also apostrophizes their lying, boasting and boldness<sup>3)</sup>:

»And none so bold beggere to bydden and crave  
Tales to tell in tauernes and in stretes  
Thyng that neuere was thouht and gut ich swor ich sauk hit  
And lyed on my lykome and on my lyf hope«.

A striking quotation concerning the deceitful arts of the beggar is found in Shakespeare's *King Lear* II. 3.

<sup>1)</sup> See *King Lear* II. 3.

<sup>2)</sup> Dodsley's *Old English Plays*. Vol. XII. p. 107. line 25.

<sup>3)</sup> *Peers Ploughman*. Skeat's Ed. C. X. III.

•My face I'll grime with filth;  
Blanket my loins; elf all my hair in knots;  
And with presented nakedness out-face  
The winds and persecutions of the sky«.

The craft and cunning of the beggar has been brought before us in many an old poem and ballad.<sup>1)</sup> Take for instance »*The cunning Northern Begger*«. (Roxburgh. Coll. 1. 42. 3.)

•I'am a lusty begger  
and live by others' giving  
I scorne to worke  
But by the highway lurke,  
And beg to get my living«.

Further verses show in a most quaint language how this beggar feigns to be a cripple, a wandering soldier shot, lame, a man like a raw sore, a man with the falling sickness, a blind man, and a poor father with his house burnt down. The ballad ends thus.

•Tis better to be a begger  
And aske of kinde good fellowes,  
And honestly have  
What we do crave,  
than steale and goe to the gallows«.

In the »*Stout Cripple of Cornwall*«. (Rox. Coll. II. 531) date 1645, we have the story of a beggar who under the guise of a cripple steals from every passer-by. He seems to have been a wonderfully nimble and healthy cripple.

•Of a stout cripple that kept the highway  
And beg'd for his living all time of the day  
A story I'll tell you that pleasant shall be  
The Cripple of Cornwall surnamed was he.

He was of stomacke coragious and stout  
For he had no cause to complaine of the gout;  
To go upon stilts most cunning was he  
With a staff on his neck most gallant and free

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<sup>1)</sup> Vide also Langl. C 9, 128. C 1, 44 . . .

He crept on his hands and his knees up and down  
In a torn jacket and ragged patcht gowne,  
For he had never a leg to his knee  
The Cripple of Cornwall surnamed was he.

A good example of the regular Münchhausen type of story which the cunning beggar of that period concocted we find in »The »*Maiming Soldier*«. (Rox. Coll. Vol. 2. pt 1. page 3) 1629. This wonderful veteran declares

»Twice through the bulke I have been shot.  
My brains have boyléd like a pot.  
I have at least these dozen times  
Been blowne up by those roguish mines  
Under a barricado  
Throwing of a hand granado:  
Oh! death was very neare,  
For it took away my eare  
And yet thank God! Ch'am here, ch'am here.

Disbanded soldiers of this description were a regular plague in England during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Those soldiers who came home from foreign parts, poor and crippled were awarded by the government a license to beg and people gave readily to these maimed heroes who were called Fortune's Bastards (vide Dekker: The Honest Whore. II.) Wonderful stories they brought home from the battlefield, they knew the number of the enemy, the names and towns of villages passed, the mutilations and horrors practised all of which adventures the credulous listened to with wonder.

So good was the business made that hundreds of other beggars personated these mutilated heroes and fabricated like stories of the dangers they had passed through. The term used for this begging under military mask was: »Skelder«.

It was not only the men-beggars who were cunning, the women also had their share and we cannot conclude our subject better than by quoting the anecdote of a sly

little »walking Morte«, as related by *Harman* in his »*Caveat for Common Cursetors*« 1567.

A walking Morte, by the way, is a beggar who is not married. Their lie is to say that their husbands died either at Newhaven, Ireland, or in some service of the Prince. Many of these have had and have children.

Whenever these unfortunate creatures have by »begging, bychery or brybery« obtained money or apparel they are quickly shaken out of all by the Upright Man, consequently they leave their possessions in different places and call for them from time of time.

»The last Sommer«, says *Harman*, »being in familiare talke with a walking Morte, I began to rebuke her for her leud lye and beastly behaviour.

,I thank God', quoth she ,I dyd one good dede within this twelve monthes. The last Sommer I was greate with chylde and I traveled into east Kent by the sea coste for I lusted mervelously after oysters and muskels and gathered many, and in the place where I found them I opened them and eate them styll. At the last in seking more I reached after one I stept into a hole and fel in into the wast. I had been drowned if the tide had come and espyng a man I cried out for helpe. He hard me and finding me fast stycking, and whether it was from striving, or for joye, I had of his comminge, I looked red and well-coullered. And to be playne with you, hee lyked me so well that I should there lye styll and I would not graunt him that he might lye with me«.

The wench requires him to allow her to wash herself first, promising eventually that she will let him have his way with her at nine o'clock at night in the barn of his house.

She then repairs to the house and tells the man's wife of her husbands falseness. The wife, in a rage tells the neighbours and they all agree to hide in waiting

near the barn and when the treacherous husband goes to the beggar, they will all rush in and beat him with sticks. The beggar wench agrees to give them a sign with these words. »Now fye for shame fye!«

The husband comes home from his work, takes a good supper and after flattering his wife retires to the barn.

The girl true to her word gives the signal »Now fye for shame fye«, whereupon the furious women rush in and taking sure hold of him »pluckynge his hosen downe lower and byndinge the same fast about his feete they layd him one untyle they weare windleds and the bloude braste plentifullye out in moste places. Thus le-vynge him blustering, blouring and fominge for payne and malyncolye they vanyshed away«.

This harsh treatment seems to have had a good effect for it is reported that the man has been faithful to his wife ever since.

*Crowne* in his »*Country Wit*« introduces us to a cunning beggar-woman. She asks for alms with a child in her arms. Sir Mannerly Shallow, the foolish country knight, sends her rudely away. »Begone-beggar woman, begone or I'll send for the beadle«. (p. 113). But the woman patiently waits on. A quarrel ensues now between Booby, a dull country clown and a man named Merry. Booby gives the beggar-woman a bag of money to hold and while the two are fighting she watches her opportunity to lay down her child and run off with the money.

The consternation of Booby may be imagined, »Hey!« he cries out«, my bag of money is alive! a bastard, a bastard. Shop thief, stop thief!« (pag. 118.)

A constable enters who puts an end to the difficulties for, »such rogues are sent to the correction house!«

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## Characteristics of the Female Beggar in Ballad. Poem and Song.

### 1. Good-Women-Beggars.

Perhaps one of the most popular and beautiful of all old English Ballads is that of *»King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid«*.

Cophetua, a prince of Africa, who never cared for women saw one day from his window a beggar:

»He saw a beggar all in gray  
The which did cause his paine«.

He at once fell in love and going to the gate, where all the poor beggars were assembled and asking for alms, he threw his purse amongst them. The maid does not run greedily after the money as do the others, but stands apart, whereupon the king calls her to him and embraces her. She is in such amaze that she turns »scarlet red and deadly white«. The end of the ballad is well known; she eventually marries the king and makes a good wife and gentle sovereign.

We see at once the moral tendency of the ballad. It is the woman's innocence and reticence which attracts the king more than her beauty. How charming are the lines which refer to her change of colour. They prove that even in those days the blush of modesty had its charm, and also point out that the beggar-maid must have been very unlike other members of her class, whose conduct was remarkable for its forwardness and freedom of speech.



The Beggar-Maid has served as a model for many later novelists and poets and mention of this ballad occurs frequently in Shakespeare etc. etc. vide Romeo and Juliet Act II. Scene I. King Henry IV. Act. V. Sc. 3.

»Joug Adam Cupid, he that shot so trim  
When King Cophetua lov'd the beggar-maid«.

Again in »Love's Labour Lost« Armada says to the Page I. 2.

»Is there not a ballad, boy, of the King and the Beggar?«

The Page answers:

»The world was very guilty of such a ballad *some three ages since*<sup>1)</sup>: but I think now 'tis not to be found: or if it were it would neither serve for the writing nor for the time«.

In the same play (IV. I) we find Royat reading about

»The magnanimus and most illustrious king Cophetua and the beggar Zenelophon«.

Ben Johnson in: Ev. Man in his H. III. 4 says:

»I have not the heart to devour you, an  
I might be made as rich as king Cophetua«.

This ballad is related by Percy in his Reliques.«  
p. 135. Vol. 1.

Printed from Richard Johnson's: »Crown Garland of Gouldeu Roses« 1612. 12 mo.

In the »*Beggar's Daughter of Bednal Green*« we possess another rare and charming description of a beggar girl.

Bessie is the daughter of the blind beggar of Bednal Green. She leaves her father's house to seek out her fortune and enters into service at Rumfort, where her prettiness and good conduct attracts round her a number of lovers. When her admirers hear that she is a beggar's

<sup>1)</sup> This mention of 3 ages since points out that the ballad must have originated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

daughter they all forsake her with the exception of a gallant knight who, after many adventures, eventually marries her.

There is an intensely dramatic and beautiful scene near the end which tells of the reticence of the beggar-father to appear at the marriage feast lest he should spoil his daughter's pleasure.

Bessie is, however, always proud of her father and when disparaging remarks are made about him she resents, whereupon he suddenly appears on the scene as a minstrel clad in a »silk clockè and faire velvet cap«, under which,

»His reverend lockes  
In comely curls did wave  
And on his aged temples grewe  
The blossoms of the grave«.

Bessie is in every respect a noble character and when we hear her father's declaration that he is the son of Simon de Montfort who was killed at Evesham, we are prepared for the dénouement.

This popular old ballad was written in the reign of Elizabeth and is quoted frequently even to this day. The first part is original, the second newly added.

It is to be found in Percy's Reliques II. p. 364.

In the »*West Country Damosel's Complaint*« we have an example of a fair maiden who loves until death. The poor girl is so fond of her lover William that she entreats him to marry her or to put an end to her existence. He unfeelingly bids her go to the woods and live on hips and haws. She obeys and leads a terrible life becoming even a beggar and imploring alms from her own sister. She is repulsed and dies in the forest.

The end of the ballad refers to the repentance of William who eventually lies down by her grave and dies by her side.

The notion of dying of grief is rather an old-fashioned one, but so true and beautiful is the self-denouncement shown by the west country damosel that our eyes fill with tears at the recital of her sufferings.

This ballad was printed for P. Brookslly at the Golden Ball in West Smithfield 1672—1695. It is to be found in Child's Collection of English and Scottish Ballads Vol. 1X. p. 157.

Not only vagrants and common people figure in the beggar-ballads, but none the less kings and queens. Take, for instance, the quaint and original ballad of »*King Henry*«.

King Henry, in consequence of misadventure is living alone in a solitary hut. One stormy night he hears a wail at his door and on opening finds before him a »poor, tattered creature of a woman«, hideously misshapen, filthy, starved and frozen.

She begs for food and drink and then entreats him to let her sleep beside him in his bed. This he reluctantly permits. In the morning, when he looks towards his companion he finds no longer a loathsome wretch in rags but a lovely woman dressed in a silken kirtle. His kindness has freed her from a weird imposed by her stepmother which declared she must be a repulsive beggar until some king had admitted her to his bed.

Although the exact date of this ballad cannot be ascertained, it seems to bear the imprint of an early age when dreams, omens, fortune-telling and witchcraft were looked upon with religious belief.

The fact of King Henry's acceedence to the request of the loathsome beggar must be accounted-for by the superstitious feeling of that period against treating a beggar ill.

Scott describes »*King Henry*« as edited from the M. S. S. of M<sup>rs</sup> Brown corrected by a recited fragment.

It was first printed in the William Tytler version for his »Tales of Wonder«.

Edited also by Child in his English and Scottish Ballads. p. 297. Part. II.

In the ballad of *Jane Shore* we find a beautiful but unhappy young wife tempted by a wicked neighbour to leave her husband whom she does not love and become a concubine of the King (Edward IV). She does so and in her new position is very humble and kind to every one. When Edward IV dies, however, the new king treats her with scorn. As she herself confesses:

»I penance did in Lombard-Street  
In shameful manner in a sheet«.

Deprived of all wordly goods she becomes a beggar:

»I begged all the day  
An still in streets by night I lay«.

She finds a beggar's grave at Shoreditch. This ballad is most striking, for, apart from its historical interest, it shows a woman with all her good and bad characteristics. Most ballads relate but one scene from a woman's life, whereas this one shows her in every phase of her existence: the loveless marriage, the succumbing to temptation, the life of luxury and ease in which, nevertheless she never forgets herself, her downfall, her repentance and her beggar's grave.

The Ballad of Jane Shore is to be found in »Percy's Reliques«. II p. 431—436 and is supposed to have been written about the year 1513. It is also found in an old black-letter copy in the Pepy's Collection, its full title: »The woefull lamentation of Jane Shore, a Goldsmith's wife in London, sometime King Edward IV. his concubine«.

The *Bailiff's Daughter of Islington* is a picturesque little ballad which still lives in the hearts of the English

people and is quoted by every school-boy and girl. It has been modernized, set to music, and inserted in up-to-date poetry and gift books. It is old, but ever new.

The bailiff's daughter rich, beautiful, but disdainful, is courted by the squire's son. She treats him with scorn and he leaves her believing that she rejects his suit. Seven years pass away when the Bailiff's daughter, repenting her harshness goes in search of her true love.

She attires herself in a beggar's gown and begs her way from Islington to London. Suddenly she sees a young man approaching her on horseback in whom she recognizes her lover. She approaches him and piteously asks for alms. Attracted by the appearance of this beggar-wench the young man asks her where she is born. She says she is born at Islington, whereupon he implores her for news of the Bailiff's Daughter. »She is dead«, cries the beggar, then the young man says brokenheartedly:

»O take my horse, my saddle and bow  
For I will into some farr countrye  
Where noe man shall me knowe«.

When she discovers her true personality to him, he exclaims happily:

»O farewell grieve and welcome joye,  
Ten thousand times therefore;  
For nowe I have founde mine owne true love  
Whom I thought I should never see more«.

The chief characteristic of the Bailiff's Daughter is a true and constant love and the passage where she pulls off her fine clothes and puts on »puggish attire« is full of sentiment. She does this to humble herself for past pride.

The ballad of: »The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington« is found in Percy. vol. III. p. 646 and also in a »Select Collection of English Songs« dated 1793.

## 2. Bad Women-Beggars.

We turn with regret from these charming ballads, in which the beggar-woman is a heroine, to the lewd productions of the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The debauchery of the »Merrie Monarch«, (Charles II.) we find mirrored in the minds and manners of the people and such poems as »The Beggar-wench turned into a Devil«, »The Knight and the Beggar«, »The Gowlin Song«, »The Merchant's Son and Beggar-wench«, are outcomes of the general immoral tendency of the period.

In »*Debauchery Scared*« or »The Beggar-Wench turned into a Devil«, we are given an account of a country gentleman who comes up to town »to taste the delights of the city«. He gets very drunk and gives his servant a guinea to bring him a wench and convey her into his chamber. The servant pockets the best part of the guinea and finding a beggar in the streets offers her half-a-crown to go home and sleep with his master; but:

He bid her be sure let his master not know by any means,  
she was a mumper;  
But bid her to rise before daylight and go, or ad-sounds!  
he would heartily thump her.

The servant then leads the beggar to his master who lies in a dark chamber, when the master:

•Eager of Joy he gave her a kiss,  
And hug'd her with flaming desire;  
The gentleman swore that she smelt so of<sup>1)</sup> cheese  
He could not endure to lye by her.

He then bids the girl wash her face wit rosewater to take away the fumes, whereupon she gropes her way to the washing-stand.

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<sup>1)</sup> The idea of beggars not being sweet smelling is also mentioned in Shakespeare: »Measure for Measure« III. 2. Lucio says that the Duke »would mouth with a beggar though she smelt of brown bread and garlic«.

»A bottle of Ink there happened to stand  
and for the rose-water she took it.  
Pouring a spoonful into her hand  
And over her face she did strook it«.

When it was light the man looked towards her and seeing her black face thought she was the devil and ran out of bed in a fright.

The introduction to this poem describes it as a »*new* and *delightful* ballad«. The taste of those days must indeed have been degenerate! The ballad dates from about the year 1685 and is found in Pepy's Collection IV. 306 and the »Roxburgh Collection« II. 101.

»*The Knight and the Beggar Wench*« is another poem quite devoid of beauty, though possessing a certain jollity and recklessness of expression.

»It doth a wanton Prank unfold,  
In as merry a story as ever was told«.

This story describes in strong and rather indecent language the adventures of a Knight who though married to a beautiful wife craves for variety and pays court to a beggar whom he meets in the fields.

The wench is thus described:

»This beggar, I should describe, without any hope of bribe,  
Was one of the Maunding tribe;  
She had a fine foot and leg, as nimble as doe or stag,  
And then she began to beg:  
As soon as my horse she sees,  
She fell down upon her knees,  
The wench had a sack, that hung at her back,  
Well furnished with bread and cheese.

She struck me into a dump, the Jade was both young and plump,  
With a round and ranting rump.  
Her feature had so much force, it raised in me remorse,  
And drew me quite off my horse«.

The knight clasps her in his arms when she cries:

»Now I am in your traps,  
What shall I do with my scraps  
There's pig and pudding and pie«.

He tells her to throw the bag across his horse. She does this and they are about to enjoy themselves together, when the horse breaks loose and runs away to the Knight's home. The Beggar cries after her »pig and pudding and pies« and the knight's peccadilloes are discovered.

The date of this ballad is the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is to be found in Pepys Collection III 222. Bagford Ballads I. 81 and the Roxburgh Collection. II. 241.

A most quaint song we find under the title of:  
»*The Gowlin or the Encounter between a Scotch Laird and a buxom Beggar-wench*«.

»Abroad as I was walking upon a Summers day,  
There I met a begger-women cloathed all in grey.  
Her cloaths they were so torn, you might have seen her skin  
She was the first that taught me to see the Gowlin«.

The drift of this song is decidedly improper, but we cannot refrain from quoting the description of the beggar-wench:

»She had a pretty little Foot, and a moist hand,  
With which she might compare to any lady in the land  
Ruby lips, chorry cheeks and a dimpled chin  
She was the first that taught me to see the Gowlin«.

I have not been able to find out exactly what the Gowlin is supposed to be: the poem says »she sticks it between her toes«, and whenever her baby cries she shakes heer foot and sings:

»My Jo, see the Gowlin«.

This ballad is found in »Playfords Pills to Purge Melancholy«, also in »Wit and Mirth«. 1719.



»*The Merchant's Son and Beggar Wench of Hull*« gives an insight into the crafty, wilely and thoroughly unconscientious beggar of which England during the Stuart period was almost over-run.

»You gallants all I pray draw near and you a pleasant jest shall hear,  
How a poor Beggar-Wench of Hull  
A Merchant's Son of York did gull.  
Fa — la — la».

The merchant's son clothes himself in rich array, takes with him £ 60 in gold and mounting his horse rides towards Hull.

He meets a beggar on the road and becomes at once enamoured. He kisses her and tells her that if she will consent to lodge with him he will give her gold.

They go together to a little house, order a fine dinner and »tost off Bumpers free«. Then the sly wench gives the Merchant's Son »a dose« which makes him lie in bed as secure as if he were dead. After this »she put on all his cloathes, his coat, his breeches and his hose, His hat, his perriwig likewise and seized upon the Golden Prize«.

»Her greasy petticoat and gown in which  
she rambled up and down,  
She left the merchant's Son in lieu  
her bag of bread and butter too«.

The poor fellow when he awakes discovers the trick and has to dress himself in the filthy garments of the beggar.

The ballad finishes thus:

»You would have laughed to see  
the dress which he was in, yet ne'er the less  
He homewards rode and often swore, he'd  
never kiss a Beggar more«.

This poem is found in the Roxburgh Collection III. 774 and Douce III. The exact date is unknown, but is probably the latter end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

One can hardly escape a shudder of disgust in perusing such specimens of the poetic art. Immorality, insincerity and every base quality is portrayed and laughed-at, whilst the romantic and beautiful ballad of earlier times is entirely out-of-fashion.

The poems are, however, valuable as giving an insight into the spirit of the period and supplying faithful pictures of the degradation into which the vagrant-classes had fallen during the Stuart reigns.

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## **Monks, Friars, Pilgrims and Hermits as Beggars.**

»For I wol preche and begge in sondry londes,  
I wil not do no labour with myn hondes«.

Chaucer's Pardoner in Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

As far back as the year 690 we read of a law enacted by Whitred, King of Kent, against begging monks. (Schmid p. 16. 7.)

»If a shorn man go wandering about for hospitality let it be given him once and unless he have leave let it not be that any one entertain him longer«.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century we read of monks, friars and hermits standing by the highway and begging. Begging with the monk must have been a very remunerative employment and we find him extortionating money by means even more contemptible than the common mendicant.

Under the names of »*Letters of Fraternity*«<sup>1)</sup> the monks sold pieces of parchment which were pretended to be drafts upon Heaven.<sup>2)</sup> The pious and credulous were only too pleased to pay a heavy sum for these papers imagining that thereby their salvation was secured.

*John Micliff* was once asked what these papers were good for and he answered in his witty fashion »to cover mostard pottis.«<sup>3)</sup>

This celebrated Oxford divine vents his spleen still further in his book entitled: »*A Short Treatise against the Orders of Begging Friars*« (Oxford 1608).

<sup>1)</sup> Langland. C. 10, 342 . . . 23, 367; Compare also Skeat: IV<sup>1</sup> 200.

<sup>2)</sup> Vide Dodsley's old Englisch Plays. Vol. I. »The Four P. P.« p. 344.

<sup>3)</sup> Select English Works. vol. I. p. 381.

He declares that the monks: »Setten more by stinking dirt of worldly goods, than they done by virtues and goods of blisse, they be ful of pride, covertise, Symonie and false robbery by false begging and flattering, for they loven more worldie mucke than vertues and the love of Jesu Christ«.

The Friars and Monks of those days were so money-grubbing that they would only promise salvation to the rich and had no compassion whatever on the poor. (Langl. C. 3, 220, 239. 4, 38, 15, etc.)

Jack Upland (Sect. 16, 17.) cries out against this covetousness and want of charity:

»Why busie ye not to heare to shrift of poor folke, as well as of riche lords and ladies? Why covet ye not to bury poor folk among you? Why will ye not be at their diriges as ye have been at rich mens?«

This obsequiousness to the rich and neglect of the poor raised the wrath of many writers against the monks and friars who were more beggars than clergymen.

In Wicliffs Works III. 374 we find:

»Freris drawnen to hem confessioun and birying of riche men by mony sotil meanes, and messe pens and trentals, bot thei wil not cum to pore mennis dirige, ne resseyve hem to be bired among hem«.

In *Political Poems ed. by Wright* p. 331—332 we read again of the friar who begs for wealth.

»And if the riche man deie that was of eny michte  
Than wolen the freres for the cors fihte  
For als ich evere brouke min hod under min hat,  
The frere wole to the direge, if the cors is fat,  
Ac! bi the feith I owe to God, if the cors is lene,  
He wole wagge aboute the cloistre and kepen hise fet clene«.

*William Langland* in his »Vision of Peers Ploughman« 1362 shows a righteous rage against these mendicant friars, these false saints who lived their lives begging

in the churches, at the doors of the alehouses and on the high roads, who even penetrated into the private households, like wolves in sheep's clothing threatening the people, under pain of excommunication to give of their substance, and thus appropriating the alms put aside for the lawful poor.<sup>1)</sup>

He dwells in a most graphic manner on the way these begging monks or »lollers« sit at evening roasting their backs over the warm fire, drinking deep and when they are full »draw him thanne to bedde«. How they rise and come out to seek a breakfast of a round of bacon or boiled meat, or a lump of cheese with a loaf of bread after which they spend the day in »ydeltresse and ese«. (Vision of P. P. Skeats Ed. C. X. 140).

Langland also tells us that many begging monks were once workmen and ill-off, till they espied that friars had fat cheeks, whereupon they also began to wear copes. Such men, he says, are truly called »Lollers« since they loll about like lame people. (C. X. 203. Vision of P. P.)

In *Cutts's: »Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages«*. p. p. 93—151<sup>2)</sup> we find that not only monks but even hermits often lived in idleness and ease, and *Riley* in his »*Memorials of London*«. p. 584. tells us how in 1412 a pretended hermit suffered the punishment of the pillory for that whereas he was able to work for his food and raiment he, the said William Blakeney went about in London barefooted and with long hair under the guise of sanctity and pretended to be a hermit.<sup>3)</sup>

This lying tendency in the begging monk is told also by Langland who relates how a number of folk set out on a pilgrimage to find Truth. At length they met a beggar in pilgrims weeds. They ask him from whence

<sup>1)</sup> C 3, 220, 239, 4, 38, 15, 89 . . .

<sup>2)</sup> v. Cutts, 6 ff. 36 . . . 195 . . .

<sup>3)</sup> Walsingham declares that an old proverb of his time was: »Hic est frater, ergo mendax«. (He is a friar, therefore a liar).

he comes and he answers: »Sinai, Betlehem and Babylon«. They then demand: »Knowest thou where dwells a saint named *Truth?*« But this he cannot tell them.

The question why *More*<sup>1)</sup> the great defender of the Catholic faith did not become a monk has often been ventilated. The following quotation from his »*Utopia*« shows us in a few words what he thought of that class of people and we easily understand why the great thinker would have nothing to do with them:

»At ne sic quidem«, inquit »extricaberis a mendicis nisi nobis quoque prospexeris fratribus«. »Atqui«, inquit parasitus, hoc iam curatum est. Nam cardinalis egregie prospexit vobis, cum statueret de coercendis atque opere exercendis erroribus; nam vos estis erronei maximi.<sup>2)</sup>

The celebrated »*Supplicacyon*«<sup>3)</sup>, of *Simon Fish* is directed against the begging monks and friars. As this is perhaps the most important work written on the subject we make the following lengthy quotation.

»The yearly exactions from the people taken by this greedy sort of sturdy, idle, holy thieves.

They have a tenth part of all produce, wages, and profits.

What do they do with these exactions?

Nothing but to translate all rule and power from your Grace (Henry VIII) to themselves and incite to disobedience and rebellion.

Yea and what do they do more?

Truly nothing but to have to do with every man's wife, every man's daughter.

But what remedy?

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<sup>1)</sup> *Morus Utopia*. Id. Michels and Theobald Ziegler. Berlin 1895 XVth and XVIth century. Lateinische Litteratur.

<sup>2)</sup> p. 54 f.

<sup>3)</sup> »*Supplicacyon for the Beggars*« 1529. English Scholar's Library Edition. Limited number only printed. Found in the British Museum London.

Set these sturdy boobies abroad in the world to get themselves wives, to get their living by their labour, in the sweat of their faces according to the commandment of God«.

This is part of the preface. We will now give a quotation from the »Supplicacyon« itself.

It is addressed:

»To the King our souereygne lorde«.

»Most lamentably compleyneth theyre wofull mysery unto youre highness youre poore daily bedemen, the wretched hideous monstres (on whome scarcely for horror any yee dare loke) the foule unhappy sorte of lepres and other sore people, nedy, impotent, blinde, lame and sike, that live onely by almesse, howe that theyre nombre is daily so sore encreased that all the almesse of all the well-disposed people of this your realme is not halfe ynough for to susteine them, but that for verey constreint they die for hunger. And this most pestilent mischief is comen uppon youre saide poore bedemen by the reason that there is yn the tymes of you're noble predecessours passed, craftily crept ynto this your realme an other sort (not of impotent) but of strong, puissaunt and counterfeit holy and ydell beggers and vacabundes. These are the Bisshoppes, Abbottes, Priours, Deacons, Archdeacons, Suffraganes, Prestes, Monkes, Chanons, Freres, Pardoners and Somners.

Yea and they loke so narrowly uppon they're proufittes, that the poor wyves must be countable to theym for every tenth eg or elles she gettith not her ryghtes at Ester and shalbe taken as an heritike« <sup>1)</sup>

This is truly a disgraceful state of affairs: the poor woman is excommunicated and treated as an heretic,

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<sup>1)</sup> The poor people not always having pieces of money Chaucer's Pardoner contented himself with silver spoons, broches, and rynges«. (Pardoners Prologue.)

if she does not give a little of all her possessions to the begging friar.

In Langland's *Vision of Piers Ploughman* there is a telling passage concerning this unjust defrauding of the needy:

»Bidders and Beggars Beoth not in the Bulle  
Bote the suggestion be soth that schapeth hem to Begge.  
For he that beggeth or biddeth bote he habbe neode  
He is Fals with the Fend and defraudeth the neodi  
And eke gylep the gliuere al agen his wille.

(a. 8. 69. Skeats Ed.)

The friars who had once been so rich in their churches and endowments became a trifle out of favour towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, no doubt because they were regular incitors to rebellion, preaching equality of rank and community of goods amongst the people, they then took to begging and even became pedlars:

»Thei becomen pedleris, berynge knyues, pursis,  
pynnys and girdlis and spices and sylk and precious  
pellure and forrouris for wymmen and thereto smale  
gentil hondis (dogs) to get love of hem«.<sup>1)</sup>

(English Works of Wyclif hitherto unprinted ed. by F. D. Matthew 1880 p. 12).

The love of drink plays also rather an important rôle with the begging monk. We are all of us acquainted with the jolly round fat »friar Tuck« and Langland gives us a stirring picture of the:

Ac cremites that en-habiten by the heye weyes,  
And in borwes a-mong brewesters and beggen in churches.

(Peers Plowman X. l. 188.)

Even the impertinent beggar in »Gammer Gurton's Nedle« sings (1575).

»I cannot eate, but lytle meate  
My stomacke is not good:  
But sure I think that I can drynke  
with him that weares a hood«.

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<sup>1)</sup> Vide next chapter!



The remedy suggested by Simon Fish against the begging monks might be applied to every beggar which has ever existed. (excepting the old and infirm.)

»Let them labour for their living by the sweat of their faces according to the commandment of God«.

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## **The Beggar in Drama.**

Not only in ballad and story, but also in drama does our friend the beggar appear. Although the scenes of such dramas are laid in the lowest and most vicious department of human life and the heroes are generally a set of unmitigated rascals who meet together to drink or thief, still, the character of these mumpers is so well drawn, their songs so mirthful and their conversations so amusing that the beggarplays of old England enjoy a popularity which lasts even to this day.

Sir Walter Scott declares that: »for humerous description and nice discrimination of character the songs of the beggars are not inferior to any other poems of the same length in the whole range of English poetry«. (Sir W. Scott. Quarterly Review 1809—1. 20.)

The first beggar-drama which we know of was printed in London in the year 1575. It bears the title: »*A Ryght Pithy, Pleasaunt and merie Comedie: Intytuled Gammer Gurtons Nedle*: Played on stage, not longe ago in Christes Colledge in Cambridge. Made by Mr<sup>1</sup>) S. Mr of Art. Imprinted at London in Fleetestreat beneth the Conduit at the signe of S. John Euangelist by Thomas Colwell«.

The scene of »Gammer Gurton's Nedle« takes place in a little village amongst a number of poor people, a quiet and respectable society. On one side of the village road lives Mr<sup>s</sup> Gammer Gurton with her servant Hodge, on the opposite side Dame Chat an inn-keeper. One day

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<sup>1</sup>) Probably Bishop Still.

Vide: Ross in Anglia XIX. 297 suggests John Bridges.

whilst mending Hodge's breeches Mrs Gammer Gurton loses her needle.<sup>1)</sup>

Everybody believes at first that the cat has swallowed it (p. 105<sup>2)</sup>, till Diccon the well-known beggar of the locality arrives on the scene. Diccon is a thorough specimen of a sly, mischief-loving mumper: fond of drink (p. 96 l. 25—99. 5—108. 42) wretchedly clad (108. 4), but always amusing and cheerful:

•But one good turne I have: be it by nyght or daye,  
South, east, north or west, I am never out of my waye. (108. 8)

Hodge tells Diccon in the ale-house of Madame Chat how his mistress Gammer-Gurton has lost her needle. Diccon at once discovers in this incident a n opportunity for exercising his mischief-loving propensities. He declares to Hodge that he will find the needle, at the same time swearing Hodge to secrecy. And Hodge swears: (112. 71.)

•I, Hodge breechelesse,  
Swear to Diccon, rechelesse,  
By the crosse that I shall kysse,  
To kepe his counsaile close,  
And alwayes me to dispose  
To worke that his pleasure is.

Forthwith the lying beggar declares to Hodge and later to Gammer Gurton that Dame Chat has stolen it. Thence he goes to Dame Chat and tells her that Gammer Gurton who has lost a beautiful red cock with yellow feet accuses her of the theft. The two women are naturally furious and a desperate quarrel ensues between them. Hodge flies away and Mrs Gurton sends for the parson to help her in her trouble. The parson, Dr Rat,

<sup>1)</sup> Needles and pins were of such worth in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that parents used to make a special allowance to enable their daughters to buy them. Hence the term: pin-money.

<sup>2)</sup> Taken from »*Specimens of Pre-Shakesperian Drama*« by John Manly. Vol. II.

a man »fond of ale and bacon«, appears. Diccon, still bent on mischief confides to Dr Rat that he has seen Dame Chat with the needle and advises him to climb into Chats' house by a hole in the wall to convince himself of her dishonesty: he then quickly repairs to Dame Chat and warns her that Hodge intends to enter her house by the same hole and steal her chickens. The parson climbs up and gets the beating intended for Hodge. The bailiff of the village is appealed to, who, after a long and amusing enquiry discovers that Diccon is at the root of all the mischief. As punishment the wiley beggar is commanded to kneel for pardon, but refuses and gives Hodge a good smack behind. Then lo and behold Hodge screams and draws out the needle from his buttocks »where it was stickynge«. Diccon is forgiven and the play ends.

As a specimen of the beggar of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Diccon is finely drawn, for in his person we find all the different characteristics of the maunding tribe. The finest touch in the whole play is, without doubt, the song in praise of ale, a song still quoted and remembered in many circles:

•Backe and syde, go bare, go bare;  
Booth foote and hande, go colde:  
But, bellye, God sende thee good ale ynoughe.  
Whether it be newe or old!

I can-not eate but lytle meate,  
My stomacke is not good;  
But, sure, I thinke that I can dryncke  
With him that weares a hood.

Though I go bare, take ye no care,  
I am nothings a-colde,  
I stuffe my skyn so full within  
Of ioly good ale and olde.

I love no rost, but a nut-browne toste  
And a crab layde in the fyre;  
A lytle bread shall do me stead,  
Much breade I not desyre.

No froste nor snow, no winde, I trowe,  
Can hurte mee if I wolde,  
I am so wrapt and throwly lapt  
Of ioly good ale and olde. etc. etc.

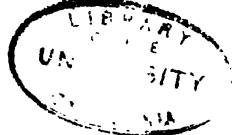
The plot of »Gammer Gurton's Needle« is amusing and the idea of basing the action on an inanimate object decidedly original. We cannot agree with Ward that the play is coarse: for a production of those times it appears to us singularly free from immoral allusions. It is regarded as one of the earliest of English comedies, published first in the year 1575, a second time in 1661.

Nearly fifty years before the appearance of »Gammer Gurtons Nedle«, was published the famous old play by *John Heywood*, entitled »*The Pardoner and the Friar*«. <sup>1)</sup> 1533. It is a regular skit against the begging propensities of the monks of the Middle Ages. The Friar declares to his audience that he comes not hither »to beg nor to crave«, yet his whole sermon is directed towards the necessity of giving him alms. The Pardoner is more outspoken and immediately solicits offerings for his wonderful relics. He is a regular type of a lying and cunning scoundrel. After declaring that he possesses the »toe of the Holy Trinity« and »St. Michaels brain pan«, he says he will receive offerings only from the just and good and that those who have committed »horrible sin« must not come forward. Another play by the same author is called »*The Four P. P.*«. It is still more amusing than »*The Pardoner and the Friar*« as an example of the tricks used by the clergy for extorting money. The Pardoner who sells indulgences from the Pope says to the Palmer:

»Give me but a penny or two-pence,  
And as soon as the soul departeth hence  
In half an hour, or three quarters at most  
Thy soul is in Heaven with the Holy Ghost.« <sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Dodsley's Old English Plays ed. Hazlitt. Page 199. Vol. I.

<sup>2)</sup> Dodsley's Old English Plays. Vol. I. Page 346. l. 6.



Amongst the Pardoner's relics are the »Great Toe of the Trinity, All-Hallow's Jaw bone and the Buttock bone of Pentecost«. The pedlar in the play who tries to sell his wares to the palmer gets this answer:

•Nay, by my troth, we be like friars  
We are but beggars we be no buyers • (p. 352 l. 9.)

Our next play under consideration is:

»*The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*« published by George Chapman at the close of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1598). The hero of this piece, a Protean beggar by the name of Trus, is an exceedingly poor attempt at character drawing and the whole plot is too wild and improbable to deserve repetition.

The only merit of the drama consists in a certain beauty of versification.

»Day's »*Blind Beggar of Bednall Green*« (not to be confounded with the ballad: The Beggar's daughter of Bednall-Green, on which Sheridan Knowles founded his comedy) is a fine specimen of humour and character-drawing into which some pathetic passages are effectively introduced.

The plot tells us of a certain Lord Mumford, who is falsely accused in the French war. Disguised as a beggar he not only successfully tracks out his enemies, but arrives on the scene just in time to save his daughter Bess from dishonour.

There is a good deal of allegorical fancy in Day's play and such historical personages as Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, Cardinal Beaufort and Henry VI are boldly introduced.

Even Shakespeare, our greatest dramatic writer has not forgotten the familiar figure of the beggar. There is scarcely a single play of his in which we do not come across either allusions to, or descriptions of, the mumper.

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<sup>1)</sup> Ward II. 599.

This is a proof of the important rôle the vagrant played at that period and also shows us that the great dramatist must have been well acquainted with the popular beggar-ballads and traditions. How often, for instance, do we find Shakespeare's characters alluding to King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid<sup>1)</sup> and how frequent and merry are his quotations concerning the mummer's life and actions: »the basest and most poorest shape of Bedlam beggars«. (Lear Act II. Sc. III.)

*Edgar in King Lear* in a fine specimen of a beggar's figure. Chased away from home through the false accusations of his father's bastard son Edmund and cursed by the father he loves so well, Edgar assumes the ragged clothes of a beggar »for«, says he, »as poor Turly good and poor<sup>2)</sup> Tom that's something yet: Edgar I nothing am!« (Act II Sc I.)

Only as a mad beggar he hopes to take revenge on his enemies and to save his poor and deceived father: the Duke of Gloucester. In a wretched little hovel on an open heath Edgar comes across the poor exiled father and mad king Lear. This is one of the most dramatic scenes of the whole play. A violent storm rages over the heath, the night is dark and ghostly and there, in that little shelter do we see the king and beggar.

Seeing Edgar's misery, King Lear begins to fancy that he too must have had ungrateful daughters:

»Didst thou give all to thy daughters?

And art thou come to this?

Couldst thou save nothing?

Didst thou give' em all?« (Act III Sc. IV)

But Edgar only replies:

»Pillcock sat on

Pillcock-hill.

Halloo, halloo, loo! loo!«

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<sup>1)</sup> Henry IV. V. 3.

<sup>2)</sup> Poor Tom was a name assumed by beggars pretending to be mad. Vide Awdeley's »Fraternitie of Vacabondes«.

In the fourth act Edgar comes across his beguiled father: »My father poorly led. World, world, world.

But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee  
Life would not yield to age«. (Act IV. Sc. I.)

The blind Gloucester is guided by an old man who tells him that Edgar is »poor mad Tom, madman and beggar too«. Edgar himself gives him the answer:

•A most poor man made tame to fortune's blows;  
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,  
Am pregnant to good pity.  
Give me your hand I'll lead you to some hiding!«

We meet again father and son in the British camp at Dover. Edgar, now clad in full armour kills his bastard brother in a duel and to the dying traitor reveals why he shift »into a madman's rags, t'assume a semblance that very dogs disdained!«

Edgar gives a touching account of his sufferings and those of his poor blind father, for whom he asked the charity of the passer by. (Act V. Sc. III.) He »became his guide,

Led him, begg'd for him, sav'd him from despair».

The *Beggars*<sup>1)</sup> *Bush* written by *Fletcher* in 1622 is, in our opinion the most characteristic beggar-play in the whole English language. We cannot agree with either Ward or Henley that the play lacks genuine humour, it seems to us to be full of passages of a lively and amusing turn. The opening scenes are especially good and show a minute knowledge of the cant language and cunning sayings and doings of the beggar of the period.

The plot briefly turns round a rich merchant of Bruges, named Goswin, who is laughed at by other merchants and on the border of ruin because his ships have

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<sup>1)</sup> The title alludes to the proverbial phrase 'to go by the Beggar's Bush', that is on the road to ruin. Beggar's Bush was a tree notoriously known on the left side of the London road from Huntingdon to Caxton.



not come into port. In his dilemma he appeals to Clause, the king of the beggars, who generously comes forward and gives him aid just in the nick of time.

The character of Clause is well worth studying. He is very rich like the »Upright men« generally were (see Act IV. Sc. 1.), he is also exceedingly generous: a trait rarely found in men of such knavish calling. His fast friendship and dog-like fidelity to Goswin is beautifully told in the following passage Act III. Sc. II:

»I dare not leave you, Sir, I will not leave you, And, till you beat me dead, I will not leave you«. Clause is, in fact, a regular hero and we feel a sympathy and affection for him throughout the whole play.

The life-like picture of the beggar's commonwealth with all its tricks, cunning and jollity is wonderfully drawn and it is undoubtedly for this reason that the play enjoyed such a lengthy and unstinted popularity.

The lustre which surrounds the character of Clause does not appertain to the other beggars who show themselves in anything but an heroic light. The speech of Prigg in answer to the orator Higgins gives us a rich idea of the cunning practises of the beggars:

»A very tyrant I, an arrant tyrant,  
If e'er I come to reign (therefore look to't)  
Except you do provide me hum<sup>1)</sup> enough,  
And lour<sup>2)</sup> to bouze<sup>3)</sup> with! I must have my capons.  
And turkies brought me in, with my green geese.  
Or straight I seize on all your privilege,  
Places, revenues, offices, as forfeit.  
Call in your crutches, wooden legs, false bellies,  
Forc'd eyes and tongues, with your dead arms, not leave you  
A dirty clout to beg with on your heads.  
Or an old rag with butter, frankincense,  
Brimstone and resin, birdlime, blood and cream,

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<sup>1)</sup> liquor, <sup>2)</sup> money, <sup>3)</sup> drink.

To make you an old sore, not so much sope  
As you may foam with i'th' falling sickness,  
The very bag you bear and the brown dish,  
Shall be escheated. (Act II. Sc. I)

Besides Clause and his staff of beggars the characters of Goswin, merchant of Bruges and Vandunk, the drunken, though, worthy bourgemeister are worth studying. The scene of the play is laid in Flanders and the first suggestion of the beggars is probably taken from the gipsies of Cervantes. We cannot turn our minds away from the »Beggar's Bush« before quoting the Canter's Oath given in Scene III. Act III. It is a most interesting specimen of the terms and phrases used amongst beggars, proving conclusively that the Beggar's Cant was not only an established, but a systematical language of its own. Higgins is the spokesman:

»I crown thy nab with a gage of bene-bowse.  
And stall thee by salamon into the clowes:  
To maund on the pad, and strike all the cheats;  
To mill from the ruffmans commission and slates;  
Twang dells in the strommel; and let the queere-cuffin,  
And harmanbecks trine, and trine to the ruffin!«

Now the interpretation:

»I pour on thy pate a pot of good all,  
And by the rogues' oath a rogue thee instal:  
To beg on the way, to rob all thou meets;  
To steal from the hedge both the shirt and the sheets;  
And lie with thy wench in the straw till the twang:  
Let the constable, justice, and devil go hang!  
You're welcome brother!

We now come to the most celebrated of all Beggar-dramas: »*The Jovial Crew*« or »*The Merry Beggars*«, by *Richard Brome*<sup>1)</sup> 1641. One must almost prove guilty to the charge of Bohemian sympathy on perusing the merry descriptions of beggar's lives as portrayed in this play. The leading characters are »maimed, lame and bowdy«,

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<sup>1)</sup> Based on Fletcher's *Beggars Bush*.

dressed in filthy rags and belonging to the most degraded types of humanity, still they are so jolly in the midst of their misery and their songs are so full of mirth that one is quite tempted to join their free and easy life and escape the troubles of business and society.

The principal characters in »The Jovial Crew« are a maimed soldier and his female companion, a wandering ballad-singer with a pair of »daxies« and a strolling tinker. The scene of action is one of those wayside ale-houses, which is the background of so many beggar dramas. Our heroes and heroines assemble in this ale-house to barter their stolen goods for food and lodging.

A fight ensues between the tinker and musician out of rivalry to obtain the graces of the soldier's female companion. The tinker, being the stronger of the two terrifies the musician out of the field and is preferred by the lady.<sup>1)</sup>

Each of these vagrants sings a song, the glee of which collection is almost unparalleled amongst the numerous lyrics of the English language.

The following are quotations from the two most famous songs:

»From hunger and cold who lives more free,  
Or who more richly clad than we?  
Our bellies are full, our flesh is warm  
And against pride our rags are a charm  
Enough is our feast, and for to-morrow,  
No sorrow, no sorrow, no sorrow, no sorrow  
Let rich men care, we feel no sorrow.

From the Beggars' Chorus:

»There was a Jovial Beggar  
He had a wooden beg  
Lame from his cradle  
And forced for to beg.  
And a Begging we will go we'll go  
And a Begging we will go.

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<sup>1)</sup> This play is without doubt the source of Burns' »Jolly Beggars«.

A Bag for my bread  
Another for my cheese  
A little dog to follow me  
To grather what I leese.  
And a Begging we will go we'll go  
And a Begging we will go.

A Bag for my Wheat  
Another for my Rye  
A little bottle by my side  
To drink when I am dry.  
And a Begging we will go we'll go  
And a Begging we will go. etc. etc.

It is a strange fact that a beggar's song is to be found in the Bagford Ballads of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which bears the double title of the two last named comedies viz: »The Jovial Crew or Beggar's Bush.« This cheerful ballad has, however, no connection with either of the plays except similarity of subject: We give a quotation:

Squat on a green plot,  
we scorn a bench or settle, O!  
Plying and Trying  
a spice of ev'ry trade;  
Razors we grind  
ring a pig, or mend a kettle, O  
Come, what d'ye lack?  
speak it out my pretty maid.

I'll set your scissors, while  
My granny tells you plainly  
Who stole your barley meal,  
your butter or your heart.  
Tell if your husband well  
be handsome or ungainly  
Ride in a coach and four,  
or rough it in a cart«.

Another Jovial Beggar's song we cannot forbear from quoting here. It is found in Motherwell's Collection and also in the Bagford Ballads. It is entitled: »*The Tinker's Occupation*«:

•Chance feeds us, chance leads us  
Round the land in jollity  
Rag-dealing, nag-stealing,  
Everywhere we roam,  
Brass mending, ass vending  
Happler than the quality  
Swipes soaking, pipes smoaking,  
Ev'ry barn a home.

• Tink, Tink, a tink, a tink  
Our life is full of fun boys  
Clink tink, a tink, a tink  
Our busy hammers ring  
Clink tink, a tink a tink  
Our job will soon be done boys  
Then tune we merrily  
The bladder and the string.

We conclude our list of beggar dramas with a play, or rather, a poem containing occasional dialogue, entitled: »*The Beggar's Wedding*« printed in Oct 19<sup>th</sup>) 1676.

This work is so full of life and graphic description and gives such a clear insight into the manners and customs of beggars that we are tempted to give the following lengthy quotation. It begins with a conversation between three girls:

*Annie*: To marry me under a Hedge as the old couple were to to-day, without Book or Ring, by the Chaplain of the Beggar's Regiment, your Patrico.

*Rachel*: How solemnly they were joyn'd and admonished by our Parson Underhedge, to live together in the fear of the Lash and give good example to the younger reprobates, to beg within compasse, to escape the Jaws of the Justice, the clutch of the constable, the hooks of the Headborough and the biting blows of the beadle.

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<sup>1)</sup> Found in the Bagford Ballads p. 872.

*Meriel*: O but Poet Scribble's Epithalmium:

To the blinde Virgin of fourscore  
And the lame Batchelour of more,  
How Cupid gave her Eyes to see,  
And Vulcan lent him legs:  
How Venus caus'd their sports to be  
Prepar'd with butter'd Eggs.

The poem of the Wedding itself consits of 116 lines  
and begins thus:

»Whilt me there lived an aged Beggar old  
That in his life full fourscore years had told  
With blear'd Ey'n, all parched, dry and cold,  
Shaking with palsi little could he hold«.

The description of his house is as follows:

»His Turf house lean'd on an old stump of oak,  
A hole a top, there to avoid the Smoak  
Of sticks and scattered bones. He still was fed  
By daily begging of his daily bread«.

The bride is described as:

»A withered beggar woman, little sundred,  
Toothless she was, nay, had worn out her gums,  
An all her fingers now were worn to Thumbs«.

And now for the Marriage:

»This marriage was divulged every where  
Among the beggars far and near  
The day appointed and the Marriage set  
The lame, the blind, the deaf, they all were met«.

They were married with an old curtain ring and  
then follows the feast:

»Pickt Marybones they had, found in the Street,  
Carrots kickt out of Kennels with their Feet;  
Crusts gather'd up for bisket, twice so dry'd,  
Alms Tubs and Alla Padridas, beside  
Many such Dishes more«.

They all get so drunk that they dance to the music of Tonges and Gridirons, even the lame and deaf joining in. The Wedding ends thus:

Then to the house  
The bridegroom brought the bride, all drink a bowse  
No room for any but them two they saw  
So laid them both to bed, on freshest Straw,  
Then took their leaves, put out the Rushen light  
But they themselves did revel all the Night.

With this revolting but wonderfully graphic description we will bring our chapter to a close.

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## Terms, Phrases and Proverbs connected with. Beggars.

•Barren, barren, barren; beggars all,  
beggars all, Sir John\*.

Shakespeare's Henry IV. III. II.

In searching through the works of those famous writers on beggary: Awdeley, Harman and Dekker we discovered an interesting dictionary of beggar terms and phrases. As we have mentioned in a preceeding chapter the beggar possessed a vocabulary all to himself and the poems which we quoted showed what an incomprehensible vocabulary it was to ordinary ears.

It is impossible for us to make a list of the extraordinary terms we met with in Awdeley, Harman and Dekker, suffice it for our subject to give a short account of the different names under which beggars have sailed and some terms and proverbs connected with them.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century we find the beggar spoken of as a *Mendinantz*, *Weux* or *Wackerantz*. In the year 1348 we first hear of the *valiant beggar*. Valiant in those days meaning strong in body.

In Edward III<sup>rd</sup>s reign, 1375 the beggar is known as a *Poulterer* and there is a petition to the king that *Ribalds* and *Sturdy Beggars* may be banished from every town.<sup>1)</sup>

In Langland's Vision of Piers Ploughman we find the beggar spoken of as an *idle loiterer*, and the term *lowsey loiterer* is also frequently met with in writings dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1)</sup> Vide Nares. II. p. 679. latter attested by B. and Fl. in Philaster V. I. Stowe p. 210. Compare Skeat: Poulter p. 460.



In Richard II<sup>rd</sup>s reign the beggar is referred to as a *Feitor*<sup>1)</sup>, a Norman-French word denoting slothful, from *fait-tard*.

In Henry VIII<sup>rd</sup>s reign we find Harman speaking of the *lousey leiterars*.

Robert Copland 1534 in his »Hye way to the Spittal-house« asks the porter if he takes in *losels*<sup>1)</sup>, *truands*, *Michers*<sup>2)</sup>, *hedge-creepers*, *fylloks* and *lusk*s. All different terms for beggars.

Sir John Cleke in his »Hurt of Sedicion« 1549 speaks of the »swarming of *loyteringe vagabonde*«.

The Jovial Beggar in »Playfords Pills to Purge Melancholy« 1600 calls his parents by the following names:

A *Craven*\*) my father, a *Maunder*\*\*) my mother  
A *Filer* my sister, a *Filcher* my brother,  
A *Canter*\*\*\*) my unkle, that car'd not for Pelt,  
A *Lifter*\*\*\*\*) my aunt and a Beggar myself.  
In white wheaten straw when their belly's were full  
Then I was got between a *Tinker* and *Trull*.)<sup>3)</sup>

\*) A *Craven*<sup>4)</sup> = recreant, beaten, cowardly. Sax: *Crafan*. »He is a craven and a villain else« Henry V. IV. 7.

\*\*) *Maunder*.<sup>5)</sup> Etym. Maund = basked. To *Maund* = to beg with a basket. »Beg, beg and keep constables

<sup>1)</sup> »Feitor« or »Faitours« (faytowre-fictor, simulator.)

<sup>2)</sup> *Etymology of micher*: o. g. *muchen*. *muchen* = steal, pilfer. Swiss dialect uses *Muchele* (Ct. Argovie) for »to hide« to steal«.

Vide Nares II. 567. For derivation of the word *losel* see page 80. *Micher* = a truant, one who acts by stealth. It is frequently united with the notion of a truant boy. Vide: Shakespeare. Henry IV. ii. 4. Shakespeare often uses the verb »to michen« (orig. ofr. *mucier*.) Vide B. and Fl. »The Scornful Lady« V. I »Some meeching rascal in her house«. Very old word, attested already in Ancrén Riwle 1210; »muchare«. *Mucettes*, s. pl. = hiding-places. Vide Liber Albus 266 to be found already in Edw. the Confessor 996 as *Muscer*, v.

<sup>3)</sup> The fact that these terms were of current use amongst writers and dramatists of the Elizabethan period is proved by our finding their explanation in »Nares's Glossary«.

<sup>4)</sup> Vide Skeat p. 141.

<sup>5)</sup> Vide Nares II. 557.

waking, wear out stocks and whipcord, *maunder* for butter-milk«.<sup>1)</sup>

Vide B. and Fl. »Thierry and Theodored«, act V. p. 365.  
 »My noble Springlove, the great commander of the maunders and king of canters«. Jovial Crew. O. Pl. X. 355.  
 »As for example, suppose a beggar be in the shape or forme of a maundering or wandering souldier, with one arme, legge, or eye, or some such maim, then imagine that there passeth by him some lord, knight, or scarce gentleman, it makes no matter which, then his honour or his worship shall be affronted in this manner«. Taylor's Workes. 1630.

\*\*\* ) *Canter*: one who cants, a vagrant or beggar, a rogue,

»A very canter I, Sir, one that maunds Upon the pad«. B. Jons. Staple of News. act III.

Talor speaks of people who gave all their money to the mendicating canters«.

\*\*\*\* ) *Lifter*: A thief: one who steals out of shops. Gothic: hliftus.<sup>2)</sup>

»Is he so young a man and so old a lifter?«

Tro. and Cress i. 2.

In another jovial beggar's song attributed to James V of Scotland we hear the beggar designated as the *pawkee auld carle*\*) carle and such terms as *Gaberlunzie man*, *Mumper*\*\*), *Whipjak* and *Losel*\*\*\*) are to be met with in the old ballads.

Thomas Harman in his Caveat 1567 speaks of the beggar as a *Common Cursetor* and he further gives a list of the different names under which the beggars of his period are known to each other:

<sup>1)</sup> Vide Mermaid Series London 18 7.

<sup>2)</sup> v. *hlifan*, corresponds to the Latin *clepo*; only to be found in the Middle Engl. period.

\*) *Carle and Churle* = Saxon *ceorl*, then used for an ill-tempered brutish person. Also used by Shakespeare. Vid. *Cymb.* V. 2.<sup>1)</sup>

\*\*) *Mumper*: Beggar, a cant term.<sup>2)</sup>

»Since the king of beggars was married to the queen of sluts at Lowzy Hill near Beggar's-Bush being most splendidly attended on by a ragged regiment of Mumpers«.

Poor Robin 1694.

(Vide also *Hudibras*: Redivivious. Part. 4. 1705.)

\*\*\*) *Losel*: A worthless fellow, one lost to all goodness from the Saxon *losian*, to perish or be lost.<sup>3)</sup>

»Now, ware thy throte, losel, thouse pay for all«.  
*Gammer Gurton O.* Pl. ii. 45.

»Peace, prating losell«. (*George a Greene.* O. Pl. ii. 45.  
Also to be found in *Spenser's »Fairie Queen«* II iii. 4.

»Provided common beggars, nor disordered lossels, who  
Men know provided for, or can, but labour, none will do«.

*Alb. England.* Chap. 39. p. 193.

*Skelton* uses the expression in his »*Magnyfycence*«, v. 1912.

»This losyll was a lorde and lynyd at his lust  
And now lyke a lurden he lyeth in the dust«.

Also often used by Shakespeare: »*Winters Tale*«  
ii. 3 etc.<sup>4)</sup>

- |                          |                                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. Rufflers*).           | 9. Abrams****).                          |
| 2. Uprightmen**).        | 10. Freshwater Mariners or<br>Whipiacks. |
| 3. Hookers.              | 11. Drummerers.                          |
| 4. Roges or Rogues.      | 12. Drunken Tinkers.                     |
| 5. Wild Roges.           | 13. Swadders or Pedlars.                 |
| 6. Priggers of Prancers. | 14. Tarkemen or Pa-<br>tricoes*****).    |
| 7. Palliards***).        |                                          |
| 8. Fraters.              |                                          |

<sup>1)</sup> Nares I. 137.

<sup>2)</sup> Compare *Goth. bimamthjan.* Luc. XVI. 14.

<sup>3)</sup> Nares II. 526 and *Rey*: Dissertation on *Skelton's* satirical poems in their relation to *Cock Lorell's Bote* p. 39. Bern 1899.

<sup>4)</sup> Vide *Skeat Peer's Ploughmann Passus* B. I. 7. 136. Vol. II. p. 128.

Of Women-kinde:

- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Demanders for glimmer<br>or fire. | 5. Walking Mortes   |
| 2. Baudie Baskets.                   | 6. Doxies.†††)      |
| 3. Mortest†)                         | 7. Dells.††††)      |
| 4. Autem Mortes.††)                  | 8. Kinching Mortes. |
|                                      | 9. Kinching Coves.  |

\*) *Ruffler*. According to Harman, a ruffler is a man who, after having served in the army, turns a bold beggar.

»Brother to this upright-man, flesh and blood, ruffling Tear-cat is my name and a ruffler is my stile, my title, my profession«. Roar. Girl. O. Pl. VI. 108.

\*\*) *Uprightmen*: See Beaumont and Fletcher's: »Beggars-Bush«. ii. I.

\*\*\*) *Palliard*: A vagabond who lies upon straw<sup>2)</sup>:

»A clapper-Dudgeon is a beggar born, some call him a paliard«. Decker Vil. Disc. O. 2.

\*\*\*\*) *Abram or Abraham-man*: Tom of Bedlam's men, or Bedlam Beggars. B. and Fl. B. B. ii. I.

\*\*\*\*\*) *Patricos, Patricoves, or. Pater-Coves*: A cant term for strolling priests who marry under a hedge. Vide B. and Fl. B. B.

†) *Mortes*. Female gypsies and beggars.

»Male gipsies all, not a mort among them«.

Ben. Jons. Masque of Gipsies.

Also quoted by B. and Fl., Decker and others.

††) *Autem Mort*. Cant language, a married woman. Vide »Jovial Crew«.

†††) *Doxy*.<sup>3)</sup> A mistress:

<sup>1)</sup> Nares II. 755. Compare Skeat p. 510.

<sup>2)</sup> Nares II. 629.

<sup>3)</sup> *Doxy*: Once mentioned by Shakespeare. Wint. Tales IV. 3. 2.

»She has studied

A way to beggar us both and by this hand  
She shall be, if I live, a doxy«.

B. and Fl. Woman's Prize iii. 2.

Compare also Dunton's Ladies Dictionary, 1694.

†††) *Dell*: Dells are young bucksom wenches, ripe, and prone to venery, but have not yet been debauch'd.

Dunton's Ladies Dictionary. 1694,

Martin Markall in his »Beadle of Bridewell« 1610 speaks of the beggars as a: »*Company of Clapperdudgions*«, and a *Congregation of Caterpillars*.

Other appellations given to beggars in the olden times are *boor*, *carle*, *churl*, *serf*, *kern*<sup>1)</sup>, *hind*<sup>2)</sup>, *tyke*, *gaffer*<sup>3)</sup>, *scrub* and *jade*<sup>4)</sup>.

Surely no sect since the world began ever possessed such an imposing list of cog-nomens!

In Anglo-Saxon times Begging was termed *wædl* and to beg *wædlian*, from which we undoubtedly derive the English word wheedle, which means to coax or lure.<sup>5)</sup>

In the reign of Henry II begging was called *Beogaunt*. To *Mump*, *Mendicate* and *Tout* are also terms meaning simply begging or pleading for alms<sup>6)</sup>.

One of the great causes for the impossibility of extinguishing beggary in the olden times was the toleration of pilgrimages all over the continent; the pilgrims having a habit of begging their way to the different holy places.

<sup>1)</sup> *kern* = a sort of boor, or lowlived person: »They have fat kerns and leany knaves, Their fasting flocks to keep«. Spenc. Eclog. July 199.

<sup>2)</sup> *hind*. o. s. *hina* *hiv*.

<sup>3)</sup> *gaffer*: female beggar, still adopted in burslesque language. Vide Hudibras Redivivious. P. 6. 1706.

<sup>4)</sup> *Jade* originally an old horse, then ugly beggar-woman.

<sup>5)</sup> Skeat Notes on English Etymology p. 319.

<sup>6)</sup> Ribton Turner's: Vagrants and Vagrancy«.

An old national *saying* was that: Dutch pilgrims begged and sang, Frenchmen begged and whined, English and Irish begged and stole and Spanish begged and blasphemed.

The old English saying: »Tuuo nictē geste, the thirddē nictē agen hine«. (Two nights a guest, the third a servant.) became a by-word in Saxon and Norman times. It referred to the laws connected with beggary at that period.

During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries when beggary had become a regular profession, a favorite mode of the vagrant for attracting attention was by means of what was then known as a clack-dish<sup>1</sup>). Hence the well known saying: »*I know you as well as a beggar knows his dish*«<sup>1</sup>)

Another bon-mot which dates from this period is: »*He begged like a cripple at a cross*«, having reference to those rascally mendicants who provided themselves with crutches and stationed themselves at the wayside crosses demanding alms for Christ's sake.

There is an old anglo-saxon term in connection with beggary: »*to give a man a hunch*«, which means chase him from your presence (vide Langland Peers Ploughman. A. XI. 46.)

»Nis no mon him neih his nuy to Amende Bote honesschen him as an hound and hoten him go thennes!«

Another beggar-saying handed us down by Langland is the following:

»For me ys leuere in this lif as a lorel begger  
than in lysse to lyue and lese lif and soule«.

(I prefer to live in this life as a beggar than to lose life and soul hereafter.)

Langland's Peers Ploughman. C. 7. 314.

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<sup>1</sup>) He claps his dish at a wrong man's door. Ben Jonson, »Every Man out of his Humour« II. I.

Shakespeare in Henry VI. I. IV says:

»Unless the adage must be verified,  
That' beggars mounted run their horse to death«.

This has been modernized into: »*Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil*« meaning that there is nobody more proud and profligate than a beggar who has become rich.

Another adage found in Shakespeare is

»A beggar's look outworths a noble's blood«.  
Henry VIII. I. I.

Again we have from Shakespeare: Henry VIII. III. III.

»I do believe it for they passed by me  
As misers do by beggars«.

In the Bagford Ballads we find a poem entitled the »Beggar's Bush«, this gave rise to the proverbial saying: »*to go by the Beggar's bush*<sup>1)</sup>«, that is, on the road to ruin.

In King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid we read the following lines:

Forgets that ever clerke he was.  
He knoweth not his estate«.

The meaning is that when one is dazzled by newly acquired riches or splendour, it is easy to forget ones, former humble station.

Poor Jane Shore in her bereavement cries out: »*For friendship parts in poverty*«, a motto quoted often in these latter days and too true ever to be forgotten.

Fair Bessie in the Beggar of Bednal Green declares to her father that she must go into the world to: »*Seek out my fortune whatever it be*«.

The world renowned saying: »*Reckon not on your chickens before they are hatched*« had also its origin in a beggar ballad in Playfords Pills to purge Melancholy 1600.

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<sup>1)</sup> Vide: Twelve Ingenious Characters 1686.

This ballad describes how a poor beggar has begged for butter-milk all day long hoping to sell it for a penny with which he will buy seven eggs; these seven eggs he will set under a hen, from which he will get seven fine capons, which he will sell for seven half-crowns.

»But as he was going home  
Accounting up his riches all,  
His foot it stumbled against a stone  
Down came butter-milk pitcher and all«.

»A Beggar and a Trader cannot be lost, because they are never out of their way« is a proverb quoted by R. Knox in his »Nineteen Years Captivity in Ceylon«. 1660.

From the same source we get also the following »Nobody can reproach the King and the Beggar, because the former is above the slander of the people and nothing can be said bad enough of the latter«.

Sir Walter Raleigh in his »History of the world 1611«, speaking of Death says: »He takes the account of the Rich and proves him a Beggar; a naked beggar which hath interest in nothing but in the gravel which fills his mouth«<sup>1)</sup>.

J. Dowland in his »Madrigals and Canzonets 1603«, gives us the following:

»Seas have their source, and so have shallow springs!  
And Love is Love in beggars and in kings.«<sup>2)</sup>

Benjamin Franklin in his Almanac of Proverbs says: Proud is as loud a beggar as Want and a great deal more saucy«<sup>3)</sup>.

Daniel Defoe in his poem »The True born Englishman. Jan. 1701 says:

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<sup>1)</sup> Taken from Arber's English Garner. Vol. 1.

<sup>2)</sup> Arber. Vol. IV. p. 621.

<sup>3)</sup> Arber. Vol. V. p. 584.



»With clouted iron shoes, and sheepskin breeches,  
More rags than manners and more dirt than riches  
From driving cows and calves to Leyton Market.  
While of my greatness, there appeared no spark yet.  
Behold I come! to let you see the pride  
With which exalted beggars always ride.<sup>1)</sup>

In the old English Play: »The Four P's«<sup>2)</sup> we find the Palmer answering the Pedlar, who would sell his wares:

»Nay, by my troth we be like friars  
We are but beggars, we be no buyers«.

*Usury* in »The Three Lords and Three Ladies« 1590 says: »*Who cares for Conscience but dies a Beggar*«.<sup>3)</sup>

In »The Two Angrie Women of Abingdon«<sup>4)</sup> 1599, we find Coomes declaring that »Some have done the like and danced a galliard at Beggar's Bush for it«<sup>5)</sup>.

Nicholas in the same play (p. 357. l. 3) says:

»I speak plainly for plain-dealing is a jewel and he that riseth it shall die a beggar«.

In the old Play »Look about you« 1600, we find John making use of the following proverbial expression: »I hold my birthright to a Beggar's scrip«<sup>6)</sup>.

In »The Heir« 1620, Cleremont says to Philocles:

»She needs no gloss that fortune can set on her  
Her beauty of itself were prize enough  
To make a king turn beggar for.«<sup>7)</sup>

In the Play entitled: »Lady Alimony« Sir Reuben makes use of the following:

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<sup>1)</sup> Arber's English Garner. Vol. VII. p. 548.

<sup>2)</sup> Curious old Play written in 1540. See Dodsley's Old English Plays ed. by Hazlitt. Vol. I. p. 352. line 9.

<sup>3)</sup> Dodsley's Old English Plays. Vol. VI. p. 423. l. 28.

<sup>4)</sup> Dodsley's Old English Plays. Vol. VII. p. 335. l. 7.

<sup>5)</sup> This was a common proverbial expression. Beggar's-bush being a tree notoriously known on the left hand of the London road from Huntingdon to Caxton.

<sup>6)</sup> Arber's English Garner. Vol. VII. p. 423. l. 13.

<sup>7)</sup> Arber's English Garner. Vol. XI. p. 518. l. 11.

»He who will lose his wits or break his heart  
For such a wench as will not take his part,  
And will not shun what he may safely fly  
May he a Bedlam or a Beggar die«<sup>1)</sup>.

»If wishes were horses, beggars might ride« is another proverb of ancient origin and such sayings as »Beggars all, beggars all Sir John«, and: »A Beggar I'll be for none leads a life more jocund than he, »are of frequent occurrence in modern times.

»*To swear by no beggars*« means to swear solemnly. (vide: Riche his farewell to Militarie Prof. 1581 and Terence in English 1614.)

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We trust that in the foregoing pages we have carried out our point in proving that the despised beggar was a person of no little importance in the history of English culture during the Middle Ages. Amongst the finest ballads in the language beggar-ballads and beggar-songs are unequalled in their jollity. Writers such as Shakespeare, Fletcher and Johnson have not despised to make the »Mumper« hero and allusions to the beggar's life, manners and tricks are found in nearly every well-known writer from the 12<sup>th</sup> century downwards.

The Beggar language itself, with its quaint spelling and picturesqueness of expression has penetrated even into our modern vocabulary and the rich assortment of beggar sayings and proverbs prove that the »maunding tribe« was one of interest and importance in the minds of the people from earliest times.

Many a learned dissertation has been written about the kings, princes, troubadours and minstrels of past ages, only the beggar seems to have been condemned to obscurity.

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<sup>1)</sup> Arber's English Garner. Vol. XIV. p. 323. l. 28.

It has been our pleasant task to rout him out of the shade and bring to light his various manners, customs, sayings and doings.

The work of unearthing our mumper hero was great, and the material we discovered too copious for one dissertation; we were, therefore, compelled to break off our subject at the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

During the course of next year it is our intention to carry the work up to present times, touching especially on those master delineations of the beggar, as provided by Gay, Burns, Goldsmith, Scott, Dickens, Lytton, etc.



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## Curriculum Vitae.

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I am born in 1872 in Bâle, where I frequented the untere and obere Realschule, studied languages in Geneva, Paris, London and Florence, passed the Mittelschullehrer-Examen at the University Bâle, the Bezirksschullehrer-Examen at Aarau and took the doctor's degree at the University Berne. I have been teacher in Bâle and Rheinfelden and am now in the position of professor for English and German at the Kantonsschule in Aarau.

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